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LOUIS BROMFIELD

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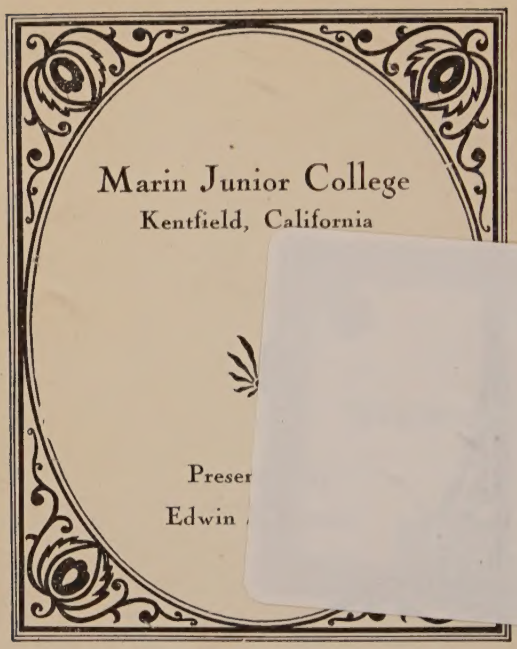

TWENTY-FOUR HOURS

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AWAKE AND REHEARSE

TWENTY-FOUR HOURS

By

LOUIS BROMFIELD

Author of

The Strange Case of Miss Annie Spragg,
A Good Woman, etc.

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For MARY *again,*
in gratitude and devotion

TWENTY-FOUR HOURS

TWENTY-FOUR HOURS

CHAPTER I

DINNER was finished at last and old Hector Champion sat like Lucullus, white and bloated, fingering a tall crystal Burgundy glass and surveying the beautiful table. It was, he reflected, like a jewel, with the four elaborate Champion family candelabra bought at Christie's last year from the tax-ridden English Champions and the high épergne filled with mandarins and black grapes and crowned by a pineapple. In the crystal glasses resting on a cloth of yellow old lace there still lingered traces of excellent wines. In the small glasses there was the pale gold of Chablis, in the shallow glasses the deeper gold of champagne and in the great crystal goblets the rich red of Romanée Conti. And now before himself and his three male guests the bronze gold of fine brandy filled the air with its slow delicate scent. To Hector the table was a thing so beautiful that the mere sight of it made him forget for a moment that he had himself eaten nothing but three digestive biscuits and drunk nothing but a glass of Vichy and that to-morrow he might be told that he had only three months to live.

And the room which surrounded and dwarfed the big

table made it appear even more extravagant and lovely. It was a room taken out piecemeal from a hotel in the rue de Varennes which had once belonged to a Cardinal, and piecemeal it had been brought to America to be put together once more in a great apartment twenty floors above the East River. To preserve the full beauty of the tan gray wood and the perfection of the overdoors painted by Boucher with soft pink nymphs and fluttering cupids, steel girders had been cut and the ceiling had been raised to fit the transplanted jewel. The windows were higher and wider than other windows in the huge building, but instead of looking out upon a green and intimate garden in the rue de Varennes they looked out over a mighty river flowing between great skyscrapers and whirring factories and crossed by three gigantic bridges. At this hour the river was a throat of ebony and the three great bridges were necklaces of light. From these windows one could see all the way from the flares of Hell Gate to the lower harbor where the great liners slid out to the open sea. It was a view so vast and fantastic that at times it conveyed to old Hector a terrifying sense of his own smallness and unimportance and so filled him with a sullen sense of depression.

As if Hector had arranged to multiply the beauties of the room, they were reflected back and forth, together with his own figure and those of his guests, from one great mirror over the ornate commode to another over the Louis Quinze fireplace where the flames in turn reflected themselves in the dark polished floor.

Hector Champion was seventy-one and soft with a white and pink complexion that seemed unnatural and a little

ghastly in a man so old, and although he had lost twenty pounds within the last three weeks, his short body remained grotesque and unwieldy and still capable of inspiring repulsion in those who had not grown used to its peculiar ugliness. The image reflected back and forth in the tall mirrors was that of a round, rather shapeless face with a small mouth and two small pale-blue eyes that were malicious and feminine and rather like the eyes of a China cat. Feature by feature he was not an ugly man. The repulsion lingered just beneath the surface, shining out of the too pale eyes, lurking in the puckered corners of the tiny mouth and in the folds of fat beneath the small ears. It was the face of a timid and unsatisfied sensualist.

The men lingered over the table instead of joining the ladies or going into the library because old Hector believed that leaving the table for brandy and cigars broke the back of a good dinner. He scarcely heard what they were saying because his thoughts kept returning morbidly to himself and his fear of death. It was worse when he was alone and so, lately, he had come to ask people to every meal—people of all sorts, even people whom he disliked and for whom he felt snobbish contempt or pity, people whom a year ago he would never have asked to his house. Anything was better than being alone. The nights were awful.

The three men who sat at his table were as diverse in character as it was possible to be. At his left, drinking his third glass of brandy, sat Jim Towner, forty-five, heavy and handsome, a sportsman whose bull-like muscles and good looks were disappearing beneath the soft fat of dissipation; and on his right sat his nephew Philip Dantry, who had

lived with the old man since he was two years old. Philip was twenty-eight and good-looking in the way of a young man who led a regular life, with certain hours allotted to work, to riding, to swimming, to boxing, and who took a rather stupid satisfaction in the efficient perfection of his body. He had dark curling hair and a rather high color and blue eyes, and he was the only person in the world for whom the old man had any love. As if the mere concentration of all his love upon this one boy had magnified its intensity, old Hector worshiped him, pestering him with spinsterish attentions and with a morbid unnatural jealousy. In a room filled with people he would watch Philip furtively, as he was doing now, fearful and exasperated if the boy appeared to be enjoying himself in the company of any one person, terrified secretly lest the boy should somehow escape from him. For Philip was more to him than a nephew, more perhaps even than a son. He was the child of Hector's sister Mary who died in giving him birth, and of an Irishman called Patrick Dantry who eloped with Hector's other sister, the beauty Nancy, who deserted a dull respectable husband to create one of the great scandals at the beginning of the century. And when Patrick Dantry was killed in an accident before he could marry his sister-in-law, the baby was left to the bachelor Hector as all that remained of his two sisters and of Patrick Dantry. Afterward he never saw his sister Nancy again. It was in a way as if young Philip was the flesh of the old man's flesh, for Patrick Dantry had been the protégé of Hector whom he had loved more than he had ever loved any woman.

The third guest, who sat exactly opposite him, was a tall man with powerful shoulders and an erect and wiry body, middle aged and possessed of an extraordinary face which at one moment appeared singularly handsome and at the next possessed of a fascinating and almost sinister ugliness. Unlike the other three he was of an origin obscure but of a fame and of a notoriety unknown in the circles commonly called by Hector good society.

His name was David Melbourn and he had emerged out of the war a rich and successful man, still under forty, but of a richness and a success incomparable with that which had come to him afterward. Only a week before Hector's dreary dinner the newspapers of Europe and America had printed his name in the most important type as the first man in the history of the world to sign his name to a check for one hundred and fifty million dollars, not his own dollars to be sure, but dollars which had been manipulated into a single vast bargain from which he himself drew a profit of several millions. There was about him a sense of enormous physical power.

He sat at old Hector's table because he was important and because old Hector was many varieties of a snob. He was a snob of family and tradition, neither of which could have included Melbourn, and he was a snob of wealth which did include Melbourn, and a snob of the spectacular which also included him. And Melbourn had been invited because old Hector knew the rumor that he was the lover of Jim Towner's wife Fanny and he wanted to see the three of them together in order that he might watch them morbidly and discover the truth. Before the dinner was half

finished, he had discovered it when Fanny made a fool of herself and betrayed her interest in Melbourn and her jealousy of Mrs. Wintringham who was sitting now in the drawing-room with Fanny and old Savina Jerrold. But the certainty of what was going on between the two did not excite the old man as it might have done a month earlier. Its edge was dulled by the fear that had not left him for days.

The dinner was so great a failure that it was proving a test of the breeding of the guests, but the knowledge of its dreariness did not disturb Hector. For a time the comedy had absorbed him and it was only now when the ladies had withdrawn, that fear returned to him like an evil smell that would not be shaken off.

2

He tried to listen to the story Melbourn was telling young Philip and Jim Towner but only snatches of the conversation penetrated the cloud of his depression and fixed themselves upon his brain. He was aware that Melbourn was relating with a kind of scornful indifference the negotiations that had been necessary before he could sign the largest check that had ever been written. He was aware, too, that Jim Towner, who was not very clever and was a little muddled by drink, understood precious little of what was being said and that Melbourn did not care whether he understood it or not. Young Philip was understanding it and in his naïve, handsome face there was a look of intense admiration for this man who at middle-age controlled factories and mills and mines and even cities in a dozen

parts of the world. The boy's interest annoyed the old man, for Hector in his snobbery considered it distinguished only to live upon the interest of a capital which had come to him by inheritance and which increased from year to year without vulgar effort. Like an irritable old woman he kept repeating to himself that Melbourn was not a gentleman, as if the assertion consoled him for the hateful certainty that this country of his and this great city were only places of ceaseless change and turmoil in which families rose into wealth and distinction in one generation and sank into poverty and obscurity in the next. In the consciousness of his own inferiority and helplessness old Hector would have welcomed a society that was completely feudal and impregnably entrenched in privilege. It annoyed him that his own nephew should admire this upstart Melbourn, and in the next breath he told himself that it was because Philip was really distinguished only on the Champion side of the family and that he came by his vulgarity from his father Patrick Dantry whose father had made his money by God knew what methods in a gang of men who robbed the citizens of New York.

But that thought only made him all the more unhappy because it roused suddenly a whole chain of memories leading down the long corridor of the years into the past of which he tried not to think, partly because it made him feel so old but more because it brought to life emotions of shame and regret that grew doubly sharp with the fear of approaching death. It was too late now for him to live and when he had been still young enough to have lived he had turned his back time after time upon life to seek

refuge in the preciosities of pictures and tapestries, old manuscripts and pieces of jade and porcelain that surrounded him now in his old age. Now he would have exchanged them all for one potent segment of life.

The thought of Patrick Dantry created suddenly the physical memory of him, tall and dark with high color and blue eyes, so like Philip sitting there a little way off listening to Melbourn. Patrick *was* like his son Philip, with perhaps more fire and a wilder way with women, for Patrick had possessed the Irishman's romantic temper and a capacity for indulging in indiscriminate love affairs which appeared never to touch or soil him. No, Philip lacked the fire of his father. He could not have everything he wanted from the world, as his father had had. Philip was Patrick Dantry, charming but dulled and blunted and efficient.

Only now at seventy-one was old Hector beginning to understand that what had always seemed impossible to himself had been to Patrick Dantry no more than the tossing off of a glass of brandy. And so Hector as a young man had come to live a kind of vicarious existence through his friend, accepting all Patrick's confidences, worshiping him and helping him in his conquests. Patrick Dantry had been all that Hector was not and all that Hector desired most to be, and so his dazzling charm and good looks had led Hector to forget that Patrick Dantry was the son of a nobody who had gotten rich by means which people did not discuss. But in that strange friendship Hector had come very near to living, and even now, a generation afterward, he could not quite forgive one sister for having

married his friend and the other for having taken Patrick from him forever. It was almost as if Patrick Dantry had possessed a fatal, unearthly attraction for any one named Champion.

He was never quite sure whether or no he had forgiven Patrick Dantry and his feelings toward the memory of Patrick Dantry were compounded strangely of suffering and joy, of love and jealousy and hatred, and of a curious painful sense of incompleteness and frustration. In his loneliness it seemed to him that Patrick Dantry was the only person he had ever really known and that it was only yesterday a telegram had come saying that Patrick Dantry was dead in the bottom of a crevasse in a glacier near Grindelwald. But the son Philip remained, grown now into a man so like his father that there were times when it seemed that Patrick Dantry was not dead at all. And Philip in a way was almost his own flesh for he was the child of his sister. In the poor distorted mind of the old man all these reflections came near to a wish that he had been a woman so that his love for the dead Patrick Dantry could have known fulfilment.

His sister Mary he did not remember very clearly but his sister Nancy, who was still alive somewhere in England, returned to him vividly in memory. Of the two she had always been the more dashing and beautiful, and looking back he thought now that perhaps Patrick Dantry had always been in love with Nancy and had only married Mary because Nancy already had a husband when he came to know her. Lately some force had been at work, softening the fat, bitter little old man as if his character

like his body were slowly breaking up; and sitting there, pretending that he was listening to Melbourn's talk, he regretted now that he had not long ago forgiven Nancy. It would have consoled him to be able to go to her now for sympathy. There was no understanding sympathy to be had from Philip. It was unreasonable to expect sympathy for the old and broken from the young who stood at the beginning of life. He saw that it was not because Philip was unwilling. It was simply that he could never understand what it was to be old and ill and lonely and to have all of life behind you instead of before you.

Watching young Philip's handsome regular profile he wondered whether the fantastic story about Patrick Dantry's body might be true—that as the glacier advanced and melted away with each quickening spring and summer the body would at length be found encased in the transparent ice, as young and as beautiful as on the day his friend and the lover of his sister Nancy fell to his death. If that were true, the body would look for all the world like young Philip only it would be cold and dead as he (Hector) might be cold and dead before the year was out. And he fell morbidly to wondering what Nancy was like now and how she had changed, for she too must have grown old as he had grown old, and all the while Patrick Dantry's body, encased in ice, had stayed young and beautiful.

3

In Hector the sense of things possessed was strongly rooted. He loved passionately his silver, his jades, his pictures and his tapestries, and now he had begun to be

troubled about what was to become of them when he died. There was nobody but Philip to whom he could leave them and Philip would not value them since he was, as his father had been, too much concerned with what possessed life to take any interest in what was inanimate, no matter how great its beauty. To Philip such a collection, he saw, would only be a burden and after years, when Philip believed that a respectable time had passed, he would be certain to sell them, perhaps at a vulgar auction where they would be carried off piecemeal and scattered among strangers. The best, then, that he might do would be to leave the finest things, the tapestries and the Bouchers, the Reynolds and the Ingres to the Metropolitan Museum; but even there, he reflected bitterly, they would be passed by unnoticed by vulgar crowds which preferred Cot and Bonnat. The smaller things would have to be sold unless Philip chose to keep certain of them—Philip who was the last of the Champion family and didn't even bear the name of Champion but the name of a handsome Irishman who was a nobody, unscrupulous and a good deal of a scamp.

The great goblets of crystal for the Burgundy were among Hector's treasured possessions. They had come from Beaune—twenty-four of them—sixteen years ago and by some miracle not one of them had ever been broken. In his pride he often told his guests that the secret of making such glass had been lost long ago. The crystal was thin as paper and yet so fine that one could press the rims of the round glasses until their rims were no longer circular but elongated ovals. It was a trick which aroused wonder in simple, childish minds like that of

the sportsman Jim Towner but it was a trick which old Hector allowed none but himself to perform, for only his soft, pink, sensitive fingers knew the point to which the delicate glass might be pressed without being shattered. And slowly through the years, as none of the glasses had ever been broken, there grew up in his twisted mind a superstition that if one were broken it would be an omen of calamity.

To-night while he kept trying to annihilate the terror of death and to stifle the past that kept returning to him against his will, the soft pink fingers kept idly caressing the great Burgundy glass that stood before him with its few drops of ruby liquid at the bottom, and the ceaseless alternating pressure and relaxation of the fingers against the delicate flexible glass seemed to bring a kind of relief to his tormented brain.

4

There was much of the *voyeur* in Hector and the trait found its expression in a morbid desire to pry into the lives of other people.

Of late the desire had come to center itself sharply in a passionate interest in the faces of people, becoming at times so strong that he would find himself in the street or at the theater or in a restaurant staring as if hypnotized into the face of some stranger, with his whole being concentrated in an effort to penetrate beyond the shell into the secrets of the life which lay concealed there. It was a kind of curiosity which people disliked and twice lately there had been unpleasant incidents when people resented

what appeared to be the lewd staring of a fat old man whose physical appearance made his attentions doubly repugnant. Once he had been shockingly near to the scandal of interference by a policeman.

But here, in his own house, he could indulge this curious passion. The sound of Melbourn's voice penetrating suddenly the wall of his morbid thought, led him to staring at the reflection of Melbourn's face in the mirror. Melbourn was listening now to some confused and pointless story which Jim Towner insisted upon telling and save for the unchanging expression of contempt the face was in repose and helplessly exposed. Hector, seizing his chance, fell to studying it.

It was a strange face, at once ascetic and sensual. The forehead, high and intellectual, was square and shaped like a box above a faintly aquiline nose. Beneath the short dark mustache the contradicting mouth was full and sensual. The line of the jaw detached itself in an angle almost brutal from just beneath the ear and ended in a square firm chin. The ears, large and well-shaped, were set too low upon the head so that they gave the whole face a look of something fierce and primitive, and the eyes, dark blue, glowed with the fire of an unquenchable intelligence and animal vitality. About the eyes and the corners of the mouth were the tiny lines which betrayed his age. The body was tall and finely proportioned, with a power quite unlike the strength of young Philip. It was the body of one who had carried burdens and worked with his hands. The muscles betrayed their strength even through the perfectly cut dinner jacket which (Hector

thought maliciously) had been cut expressly to conceal a muscularity which was not entirely gentlemanly in its origins.

He watched the face in the mirror with a complete absorption, wondering what tragedies, what passions, what force of will had molded it, reflecting how odd it was that people made their own faces. Faces grew out of people's lives; and this face was the product surely of a hard and fiery life. There was something in it which was a little tired. It was, he thought, the face of a powerful man, perhaps at once cold and sensual, whose power lay in his detachment and shrewdness and the force of an incredible and ruthless will. And he understood suddenly why Fanny Towner had made such a fool of herself at dinner, insulting Mrs. Wintringham and putting herself wholly in the wrong and beyond the sympathy of any of them. He understood that this was a man who could be very dangerous to women, and especially to a woman like Fanny, brought up so carefully and respectably to marry a dull lovable man like Jim Towner. What could Jim Towner know of the shamelessness of women in love? His love-making was doubtless as skilled as and less passionate than his manner of taking a glass of whiskey. But with this man Melbourn there was something exciting. Old Hector, suddenly aware of a morbid stimulation, saw why it was that when Melbourn came into a room the women behaved like mares in a pasture when the stallion is turned in. He knew why they turned pink and their eyes grew brighter and the silly ones became ridiculous and coquettish, the beautiful ones more

beautiful and the clever ones paragons of cleverness. The man was a wilful and ruthless brute capable, perhaps, of the gentleness that can devastate women. And Fanny was desperate to-night because she feared she was losing him. She was his mistress and she was frightened of Mrs. Wintringham and she had reason to be, for Mrs. Wintringham was younger than Fanny, and more beautiful and above all else more calm. She had a sense of dignity and reserve which was a weapon of steel against Fanny's unbalanced and shameless hysteria. It was odd too, considering that Fanny had been brought up as a lady and the other woman was a nobody, and like Melbourn, a kind of adventurer. It would be hard on Fanny. A woman like Fanny aroused and deserted by such a man as Melbourn might go completely to the devil afterward, especially when she was nearly forty, with not many years before her.

He found a vicarious excitement in turning the intrigue over and over in his mind. He began to imagine Melbourn making love to Fanny, caressing her, overwhelming her with his desire, and his fat fingers grew restless and pressed the crystal goblet so violently that it gave out suddenly a faint singing sound of warning and the pink fingers relaxed sharply.

He wondered if Jim Towner had a suspicion that his wife was unfaithful to him with this man who now listened to him with an air of such frank contempt. He had known Jim since Jim was a little boy. He had watched him grow older and presently become handsome, and now he saw him beginning to grow shapeless and gross in dis-

sipation and decay. He wondered whether it was Jim's drinking which had driven Fanny toward Melbourn or whether it was Jim's knowledge of her conduct which had driven him to drinking. It was amusing to compare Jim's face with Melbourn's. The one man had been born with everything in the world, wealth and position and good looks. He had been the best loved man in his clubs and in his college and when Fanny married him he was the greatest catch to be had, and now after fifteen years he had turned into this overheavy middle-aged man with a face that was growing shapeless and sodden and weak. The other man, born perhaps with nothing, had gone quite the other way. His face was as sharply modeled as if it had been of bronze cast in fire. It was not, he thought, astonishing that Fanny had been drawn from the one to the other, for women were much more primitive than men and beneath their fine clothes and their delicate skins and their ladylike airs there was a wild and primitive hunger for a vulgar brute like Melbourn.

Old Hector reflected that he had seen many young men go the way of Jim Towner. The ones who at twenty to thirty were popular and dazzling and full of charm seemed somehow to melt away into a sudden middle age that was colorless and deadly, in which the only bright spots were club reunions when they became known again for a little time as "good old so-and-so" and regained for a little time some of their youthful and departed glory. Jim Towner was like that. Perhaps out of despair at his own dulness he had taken to drinking. When his youth and animal charm had begun to fade nothing else re-

mained. Perhaps he was aware that people were bored by him.

And then, without any reason, it struck Hector suddenly that young Philip was the Jim Towner of fifteen years ago—handsome, attractive, a little stupid and loved by every one. Perhaps, Philip would go the same way. Perhaps, Philip would marry a woman like Fanny who would make a hell of his life. But he tried not to think of Philip marrying any one, because he could not bear the thought.

Of all of them there about the jewel-like table only Philip's face was still young and unmarked by time. Everything still lay before him. And suddenly there swept over old Hector a sudden perverse and passionate desire to enter into Philip's body without losing his own identity, to *become* Philip and still remain himself, so that he might live in Philip and experience all of life through him. It was a desire which returned more and more frequently of late.

He was aware that there was always a wall shutting him off from Philip. The boy wasn't like his father, revealing all his life to Hector. He was shy and reticent so that no matter how old Hector tried he never knew what Philip was thinking or what his life really was, what woman he loved. He knew only that there was a girl, an actress he thought, whom Philip saw constantly, but he did not even know her name and he dared not ask for fear of making more impenetrable the barrier which shut him away from the boy. He thought suddenly that after all, despite the fact that he was the only father Philip had ever

known, the boy did not belong to him as much as to that father buried in the ice who had run away and left him when he was a baby scarcely two years old. He might belong even now to that actress whom old Hector had never seen, whose name he did not even know. And he kept saying, "She mustn't have him. He is mine. I must keep him until I die. It will only be a little while."

Then suddenly he flushed as he saw Philip regarding him with a look which seemed to understand what was passing in his uncle's mind, but almost at once he saw that Philip was trying to tell him that they had better join the ladies. Philip possessed no such power of penetration. He never saw beneath surfaces.

Old Hector nodded and prepared to rise but at the same moment he saw approaching him in the mirror the figure of his valet, Soames, a tall, yellow, thin man who looked like a severe Methodist parson and walked with a noiseless tread. Soames was bearing a silver platter and on it lay the red and white envelope of a radiogram. Although the only person in the world whom old Hector loved was sitting there opposite him, he was overcome sharply by a sudden sense of calamity which concentrated itself in the red and white envelope. The pink fingers contracted sharply and there was the sudden musical sound of fine glass being shattered. The big goblet was broken and from a little heap of shivered glass its stem remained erect, crowned by a flower with jagged petals of crystal.

Trembling a little he took the envelope and slit it open with a silver fruit knife. He was aware now that the others were looking at him and he was irritated to the

depths of his secret nature that they must watch him while he read. . . . The mere sound of the tearing paper was unbearable to his tired nerves. The opening of the envelope seemed an endless affair. He opened it and read,

HECTOR CHAMPION
— SUTTON PLACE
NEW YORK
ARRIVING TO-MORROW MAURETANIA MAY I COME TO TEA
ANSWER RITZ HOTEL

NANCY

Twice he read it through before he could be certain that he had not suddenly lost his reason. It wasn't possible, after thirty years, that Nancy should suddenly telegraph him like that, as if she'd only been away a day or two and nothing had ever happened. But in the next second he saw that it was more than possible. It was exactly what Nancy would do. Nothing ever made any impression upon her. She would act exactly as if nothing had ever happened, and as though they had last seen each other only yesterday instead of twenty-five years ago.

Then he remembered that the others were watching him, and he turned to Soames and said, "No answer," and rolled the paper into a little ball and threw it into the Louis Quinze fireplace. Rising, he felt suddenly dizzy and was forced to lean on the chair.

"I think we'd better join the ladies," he heard himself saying. "Savina will be wanting to play bridge."

The past was rising in a mist to envelop him.

He insisted that the others pass through the door before

him—all but Philip who looked at him anxiously and then said, "You've cut yourself, Uncle Hector."

Looking down he saw that there was a drop of blood on one of the pink fingers. He carefully wrapped his handkerchief about it and then saw with annoyance that Philip was still watching him. He turned away and walked through the door. He could not tell Philip what the radiogram contained. In twenty-five years he had never spoken to Philip of his Aunt Nancy and now he simply could not utter the words.

But he resolved to tell Savina because he would need some one to help him cope with Nancy, and Savina he could count upon. She was the salt of the earth. For a second another regret assailed him. He wished now that he had married Savina years ago when she wanted to marry him. But the regret passed quickly, lost in his terror of the broken goblet. After all these years the precious set of twenty-four had been broken and by his own hand.

He remembered too that it was Savina who had helped Nancy and Patrick to run off. It was in her drawing-room that they had met and planned the elopement. And again he felt old and dizzy and confused, for he suddenly hated Savina who was his oldest friend because she had helped to rob him forever of Patrick Dantry. Suddenly he thought, "I am going mad."

5

In the drawing-room Savina Jerrold sat majestic and upright on the sofa, clad in a kind of black satin bag with

a gold cord round the middle and adorned with all the Jerrold diamonds which had been famous in the Nineties but now beside the glittering artificial diamonds of Fanny Towner seemed dusty and old-fashioned in their heavy gold settings. Nobody but kept women wore real diamonds any longer.

Savina was sixty-seven, an old maid, and weighed two hundred and fifty-eight pounds. Her hair, which was thin and gray, she wore in a little knot on the top of her intelligent head and much frizzed out at the sides to give an effect of luxuriance. She had always been a large plain woman and since she had become enormously fat she no longer made any attempt at ornamenting her torso, but every two months she endured two hours of torture at a hairdresser in order to achieve the artificial waves which she earnestly believed gave the illusion of a handsome *chevelure*. And she was intensely proud of her feet, which were so small as to be out of all proportion with her grotesque body. She bought the most costly and frivolous slippers ornamented with elaborate jeweled buckles, and she always sat so that the tiny feet were displayed to the greatest possible advantage. It was as if she understood that her middle was hopeless and so concentrated upon both ends. To-night she was angry because she considered herself vulgarly overdressed with all her diamonds and because Hector had had the bad taste to invite Jim and Fanny Towner to the same dinner with Melbourn, not to mention Mrs. Wintringham who she was beginning to suspect was as out of place there as any of the others. For Savina was conservative by nature

and did not approve the modern fashion of dinners given to create sensations. She said often enough, "I don't mind how many lovers a woman has so long as she does not annoy other people with her goings on." And so she wanted coldly to strangle Fanny Towner for being deliberately rude to Mrs. Wintringham and for being common and cheap. She told herself that Fanny was "being terrible" and that she ought to be ashamed of herself and that certainly her aunt, Alida Parsons (who lived with Savina), must speak to her about her behavior.

Savina had forgotten that once, more than thirty years ago, when she was in love, she had made a fool of herself.

She kept talking, saying the most banal things, to which Fanny kept making the most banal answers, with a word now and then put in by Mrs. Wintringham, to whom Fanny refused to address any remark. It was like a family quarrel, thought Savina, in which two members of a family converse with each other only through a third. And all the while she kept watching Fanny's pretty tired face and wondering why a woman who had everything—looks, fortune and an attractive husband—should have made such an utter mess of her life. To-night Fanny looked older than her age, thought Savina, in the cruel way which pursues a woman when she is struggling to hold a man. Little lines seemed to have leapt up out of nowhere and under her blue eyes there were violet shadows as large as oysters. She was a blonde with blue eyes, a small pretty nose and curly short yellow hair. "Thank God!" said old Savina to herself. "I was never beautiful and never a baby blonde." The year Fanny came out

every one called her "Baby." Why, Savina asked herself, had Fanny worn pink as if she were a débutante when it made her face as hard as nails? Why did pretty women never understand that they did not remain all their lives at the age of eighteen?

They talked about the opera and Savina fell idly to examining Mrs. Wintringham with minute attention, wondering as Hector had done, who she really was and whence she had really come. She was dressed in black chiffon which floated about her slender figure now concealing, now revealing it, and heightening the paleness of her face and the reddish tinge in her dark golden hair. From her throat hung a single string of enormous artificial pearls. She had a pleasant voice and she did not talk too much, but just enough, never trying to pretend that she knew people she didn't know and taking no part in the conversation when Fanny kept turning it again and again deliberately to relatives and friends who were outside her circle. "Fanny," thought Savina, "is being a ——." But Mrs. Wintringham had every advantage over her. She was younger. She was not the sort who faded quickly. She was quiet and gentle and superbly calm and she had the air of being able to wait. Savina thought, "Melbourn will be hers in the end if she wants him." She was the lady that Fanny should have been and wasn't. Her clothes, her self-possession, her beauty, her poise were her weapons. Savina decided that there was nothing stupid about her. There was something about her that teased the curiosity and something which beneath all the quietness glowed with warmth.

Trying to keep her mind on the conversation she said aloud, "The trouble is that we all have too many friends and acquaintances. We can get from place to place too easily. Any one can telephone or telegraph you. I find that life has just become a muddle. Life in New York isn't worth a nickel any longer. It's just running from one person or one place to another."

She put down the stick she carried because her feet were too small to support so heavy a body, and lighted a cigarette, hoping that somehow one of the other two women would take up the conversation and go on with it, but nothing happened, and she cursed Hector inwardly for the hundredth time for putting her in the position of hostess at an impossible party.

"You may call me an old fogey if you like; but I think people aren't even the same any more. They're all superficial and distracted, the women hopping about from one party to another, afraid they won't be in the proper places at the proper times, and the men so tired that all they think about is drink or a chance to get to bed, not to make love but to go to sleep."

"Melbourn's not like that," said Fanny defiantly.

"Well. He's different. He's got enough vitality for ten men. I've been reading a book which says that vitality is all a question of sexual endowment. I'd never thought about it before but I suppose there's a good deal in it."

"A great deal," observed Mrs. Wintringham with a quiet intensity.

Savina thought, "If Hector doesn't bring in the men in a moment I'll go and make a scene and make them

come in. I'm too old to go on with this kind of thing. Life is too short." She decided that she hated and despised all women with their catty, jealous ways and their capacity for making mountains out of molehills, and that poor Fanny was the apotheosis of all feminine nonsense. She was so spoiled and hysterical and exaggerated that it was no wonder that Jim Towner took to drink.

"I'd like," thought Savina, "to take a hairbrush to her." And then all at once she caught in Fanny's tired, pretty face the shadow of a look so desperate and miserable that she was ashamed of herself and felt sorry for the girl. Although Fanny was thirty-eight, Savina thought of her always as a "girl."

She kept on making banal talk, until the boredom became so intense that she scarcely knew what she was saying. The room began to swell and sway before her eyes, but through the boredom she kept seeing Fanny's twisted unhappy face and she thought, "If this is passion I'm not sorry that I missed it. This thing called love seems to me to be more and more of a nuisance. God deliver me from such misery!"

Mrs. Wintringham rose suddenly and walked over to look out of the window.

"What's the matter with old Hector?" asked Fanny suddenly. "He looks gray and ill."

"I haven't the faintest idea."

"I thought you'd be the one to know if any one did."

"Well, I suppose I would, but he hasn't mentioned it to me and you can't speak of that kind of thing to him."

Mrs. Wintringham, standing at the window, suddenly

spoke. "It's begun to snow," she said. "It's snowing so hard you can't see the other side of the river."

Savina decided suddenly to go to the dining-room and fetch the men by force, for she detested conversation even when it was good and loved only the bridge table. She held that she was sixty-seven years old and had long ago used up all her dinner conversation and that for years she had only been repeating herself. She started painfully to hoist her great weight on to the tiny, pretty feet, and at the same moment the door opened and the gentlemen came in headed by Melbourn, looking cold, hard and irritated; then Jim, looking fishy-eyed and a little unsteady; and then Hector, looking, she thought, even whiter than he had looked during dinner, and with a finger wrapped in a white silk handkerchief, and last of all young Philip, looking so high-colored and handsome that Savina forgot even her boredom and began to think about his father Patrick Dantry and how her common sense had saved her from falling wildly in love with him like half the women of her day.

6

As the gentlemen entered the room Hector saw that Fanny, restless and unhappy, looked quickly at Melbourn who chose not to see her. It was Mrs. Wintringham whom old Hector himself noticed. It was as if he had never seen her before until now. She had turned a little from the window in an unconscious pose which completely captured his eye. There was something in the poise of the beautiful figure against the blue-black of the night be-

tween the crimson curtains which touched his extreme sensibility to all that was exquisite and perfect. She, too, was looking toward Melbourn but more quietly than Fanny. And Melbourn was looking back at her.

Savina rose and seated herself at the bridge table, angry now that Hector had invited seven people to dinner so that it was impossible to make either one or two tables of bridge without disturbance. She drew a card and said, "Come along and cut. We've wasted enough time making chit-chat."

But old Hector, who would usually cheat at cutting in order to make certain of a place at bridge, said that he felt tired and didn't want to play, and Mrs. Wintringham said quietly that she didn't play well enough and preferred to talk. As she said this she looked at Savina and between them there passed a sudden understanding glance of sympathy, which for an instant made them allies. It was a glance which said to Savina, "I am aware that this is a hopeless dinner party and that if I sit at the table with Fanny Towner, there will be a scene because she is determined to have one. It is all childish. I play well enough and I love playing, but not under these circumstances."

The others began urging each other with false sincerity to sit at the table, wasting more precious time, until Savina said sharply, "Let's stop backing and filling. I'm sure Hector and Mrs. Wintringham don't want to play. Come along, Fanny. You and I will take on any two of the men."

She knew that Fanny must not have either her husband

or her lover for a partner, and she was aware by now that Hector had shamelessly washed his hands of the whole party and left it to her to carry through to safety. She was impatient at being kept from her bridge, for she played as a habit about six hours a day and was able by her skill and her vitality to wrest victory from the most hopeless cards and the most stupid partner.

So the three men cut and the cards ironically cast as partners Melbourn, the lover, and Jim, the husband, with young Philip watching. Savina shuffled with a great snapping of the cards and thrust the pack aggressively at Jim to cut. Old Hector said to Mrs. Wintringham, "Let's sit in the library where we may talk without disturbing the others."

As he followed her through the door he was struck suddenly by the beauty of her figure and of the back so generously exposed by the cut of the dress, and he experienced a sudden wave of almost physical excitement, which sprang not from desire, for he had never genuinely desired any woman, but from the imagination. He fancied how exciting she must be to a young man like Philip, and the thought of Philip and Mrs. Wintringham together roused once more that fierce impossible desire to enter into Philip's being so that he might experience through him all the fleshly excitements which he himself had never known. Yet he wanted, too, to remain himself so that he might enjoy the pleasure of his senses with a detachment which young men in the heat of youth never knew. It was a desire so complicated and grotesque and perverse that he told himself again he must be mad as well as ill.

Mrs. Wintringham went over to the small fire beneath the Ingres portrait which was like a jewel set in a casket made by the beauty of the small dark room. She looked at him and said, "It's a beautiful room. You are lucky to have both taste and the money to satisfy it."

In a world which took beauty and wealth so much for granted, the remark pleased the fat, white old man and made him for a moment pleasant and amiable. He complimented her upon her clothes and thought again how exquisite and complete she was from the crimson and gold slippers to the black chiffon handkerchief with crimson initial tied to her wrist and the tiny cigarette box of enamel studded with sapphires from which she was taking a cigarette. He suddenly coveted the little box with the passion of a miser and guessed that so precious an object must have been a gift from Melbourn. It was the kind of tiny gimcrack which must have cost a small fortune.

He said, "How is the shop going?"

"Very well." She lighted her cigarette and looked out of the window as if her mind were elsewhere.

"Antiques are an amusing business."

"Yes." She smiled at him suddenly and in her smile there was a faint shadow of mockery and bitterness. It struck him suddenly that there was something hard in her which he had not noticed before, a kind of complete self-possession which might have been born at the same source as Melbourn's domineering assurance. He was used to soft people and the intimation disturbed him, because he felt somehow that, like Melbourn, she was quietly con-

temptuous of him and Jim Towner and Fanny and people like them, all the people who had been born to soft lives.

Quite suddenly she said, "I'm going to ask you something impertinent. Why did you invite me here to-night?"

He wasn't used to directness and in his terror of "situations" the question startled him so that for a moment he wasn't able to answer. Then he said, blandly and insincerely, "Because you are beautiful and charming and very presentable and an ornament to any party."

Obviously she didn't believe his answer, for she asked at once, "It wasn't simply to humiliate me?"

Again he found himself at a loss and only managed to mutter, "Humiliate you . . . how?"

"Because I am a stranger."

Slowly he began to see what was in her mind—that she thought the dinner a plot to make her seem gauche and an outsider before Melbourn. She had a wild fancy that she had been tricked. There was something about her that demanded honesty and honesty, he found, was a difficult rôle. He had been dishonest and suave for so long that these things had become a habit, serving only to increase the shell of loneliness which encased his very soul.

He said, "I shall be quite truthful. I was filled with curiosity about you. I wanted to know you better."

Again she smiled and said, "That's very flattering. There isn't much to know." She seated herself in the big *bergère* and added, "I suppose I must seem a kind of adventuress." Then she laughed suddenly and said, "I'd never thought of that. I suppose even adventuresses don't think of themselves that way because it all seems quite natural."

He suddenly fancied himself aware of depths in this woman, the kind of depths which were not to be found in women like Fanny, who was all surface, or even the downright Savina, who was as transparent as crystal. There was about Mrs. Wintringham a quality of mystery born, he supposed, of her past, whatever it was. No one really knew anything about her save that she dressed beautifully and had been married at least twice and had a shop called Quince and Wintringham, where she sold antiques, and that she had friends among the more adventurous black-sheep of Hector's conservative and fashionable world. Watching her as she sat curled up softly in the big chair with the firelight shining on her red-gold hair, he fell into the most romantic speculations, quite unaware that she had driven from his mind the annoyance of Nancy's sudden telegram, and even his terror of dying. He found himself peering gravely into her face, trying to get behind it and discover the real Mrs. Wintringham behind all the self-possession, the caution and the guarded intelligence. A woman who made her way in the world had to be cautious, he told himself. She couldn't live like Fanny.

It was clear that she didn't mean to go on talking of herself, for she turned suddenly and concealed herself in a cloud of banalities about his pictures, his rugs, his bibelots, and while he talked to her another part of his brain was watching her and thinking how perfectly she was a symbol of a changed world. In his youth a woman like this would have been a courtesan pure and simple, but nowadays a woman could make her career respectable

by marriage and divorce, wringing from a husband by law far more money than she might wring from a lover by her devotion or his indulgence. She had been married twice, it was said, and so she must have been divorced twice and so come by the money that bought these expensive and beautiful clothes. And she could not be more than thirty, with all life before her. She was still so young that even her face revealed nothing to him. It was simply a beautiful face bright with the youth which he desired so passionately and so bitterly and could not possibly regain.

Outside the snow was falling faster and faster until through the millions of tiny flakes the lights of the rivers had turned into wavering globes of rose and yellow, and inside the fire burned softly and the servants came and went so quietly in the small room that one was scarcely aware that they had brought things to drink and gone away again. This quiet beautiful woman was good for his nerves. Slowly he came to feel almost at peace. He had had no idea that women could be like this.

He heard her saying, "You've cut your finger," and that made him frown, for it brought suddenly to mind Nancy (damn her!) and her telegram and the memory that the doctors might tell him to-morrow that he had only a few weeks to live. If only he had not broken the goblet . . .

She had risen and tossing her cigarette into the fire crossed quietly over to look out of the window down at the river once more. It appeared to have a fascination for her and she stood for some time in silence while he

watched her, thinking again how perfect she was. In her delicacy, in the way she moved and in the way her blue eyes were set, wide apart beneath the low, smooth, white forehead, there was a beauty strange and almost fey. It astonished him that a woman could have made her own way thus far in an adventurous and difficult world without bearing some mark of the struggle. He was thankful that she wasn't one of those women who felt she must go on chattering even when she had nothing to say.

She turned to him and said, "It's a beautiful view. You are lucky. It is one of the most exciting views in the world."

"It is magnificent if you like this terrible city."

Her eyes seemed to darken suddenly and she said in a low voice, "It is the most wonderful city in the world—the most wild and beautiful!"

She was, he thought, certain to love it. It was a city made for adventurers like herself and Melbourn, a city in which you could have whatever you chose if you desired it enough. No one bothered you. No one cared who you were. Rome in its great days must have been like that.

"Have you traveled much?" he asked, hoping that the question might lead him to some faint revelation regarding her past, but she only answered, "I lived in Europe and once for a time in China." Quietly she crossed over and took up her bag and the little enamel box studded with sapphires. "I must go," she said; "it's late and I've had a troublesome day at the shop."

"Will I find you there if I come in to-morrow?"

"I'm always there between four and six."

"Perhaps I'll find something to buy."

And then he was aware that the giant figure of Savina was filling the doorway. She was leaning on her stick and saying, "Come and say good-by to us, Hector, we're leaving."

He had no idea that so much time had passed while they sat, now talking, now silent, before the comfortable fire.

7

In the drawing-room, Jim Towner had disappeared, perhaps, thought old Hector, because he found it painful and ridiculous playing bridge at the same table with his wife and her lover, or because he felt too muddled to be any longer presentable, for he was still enough of a gentleman to disappear before he became objectionable. A strange depression seemed to have settled upon them all, even upon the stalwart Savina, and they were all silent as if tired and waiting for something. In the center of the table was a little heap of banknotes. Melbourn was writing a check. Philip was seated in apathetic silence smoking, with his thoughts obviously miles away. Fanny looked suddenly tired and pitiful, with great circles under her eyes and harsh lines about her mouth.

It was Philip who broke the silence. He became suddenly aware of his manners and said nervously, "The ladies have won everything. Savina never loses."

In old Hector, nursing his cut finger, there arose a sudden bitter desire to hurt some one. It was poor dis-

traught Fanny upon whom his malice fell. He said, "The gentlemen seem to have been wildly fortunate in love." For a second Fanny seemed not to notice and then suddenly she bit her lip and her eyes filled with tears.

Savina, standing close to Hector, whispered savagely, "You *are* a dirty swine, Hector." She hated him sometimes, perhaps, he thought, because she had never forgotten the humiliation of the day in the orchard at Staatsburg.

Melbourn had tossed the check into the middle of the table and was writing something on a bit of paper he had torn from the bridge score. Fanny's glance was following the tip of his pencil and when he noticed that she was watching him he folded the paper abruptly and thrust it into his pocket, saying, "It's a note to remind me of something," and then stood up.

In the hallway, while they were putting on their coats, Hector remembered suddenly that he had not told Savina about Nancy's return and that he would need Savina's help. No matter how awful Nancy turned out to be, he could count upon Savina's loyalty.

He said in a low voice to her, "Nancy is coming home."

"Nancy," she repeated in her booming voice, "Nancy who?"

"My sister Nancy."

Savina, coat poised midway, said in astonishment, "You mean Nancy Carstairs?"

"She's Lady Elsmore now."

He hadn't meant the others to hear the news but Savina's deep booming voice had betrayed him. They were

all listening now and he had to explain. "My sister is coming home. She's been away for years. That's why Savina is astonished."

Of course, Melbourn and Mrs. Wintringham had never heard of her.

Suddenly he noticed young Philip's face. All the color had gone out of it. Philip was staring at him.

"You mean *Aunt* Nancy?"

"Yes."

It was very awkward, considering that Nancy had run off with Philip's father, but even that couldn't explain the sudden change in the boy. He couldn't possibly have remembered Nancy. He hadn't seen her since he was two.

Then Melbourn said, "But I know Lady Elsmore. I've dined with her in London. Sir Henry's coming to New York to close a deal in mines with me. I never knew she was your sister. We shall all have to dine at my place one night."

And then Savina said gently, "Bring her to tea to-morrow, with me to-morrow, Hector."

They all said good-night over again, and Savina offered to give Mrs. Wintringham a lift. It was all very quiet. They all seemed tired.

It was Fanny who had won after all, for Melbourn was taking her home. And then Hector saw him pass the bit of paper torn from the bridge score to Mrs. Wintringham and saw Mrs. Wintringham reading what was written on it in the shadow of her fur coat, and a curiosity so vio-

lent attacked the old man that he felt suddenly dizzy again.

The elevator door suddenly slid open and all of them save Philip were swallowed up and dropped twenty floors into the snowstorm that was covering all the city in a thick blanket of white. Philip put on his hat and coat, but he was waiting for something. He turned now to his uncle and said, "Are you feeling ill, Uncle Hector? Is there anything I can do?"

The old man wanted passionately to cry out, "Don't go away! Stay here with me. I'm dying and I can't bear to be left alone, knowing you've gone down into the city with all the others. I know where you're going . . . to see that girl who possesses you in a way I never can." But he only frowned and said, "No, I'm tired. Don't fuss about me." He couldn't stop Philip from living.

"You're sure?" asked Philip, peering at him.

"I'm quite sure."

"Tell me . . . about Aunt Nancy. Is she coming here?"

"No. She'll be at the Ritz. She's lived at Ritzes for so long. I think she'll feel more at home in a place like that." A wave of bitterness swept over him and he added, "You see she's led that kind of life for so long, she'd only be bored with us."

Philip blushed suddenly. "I'd like to see her."

"Of course you'll see her."

The boy lighted a cigarette and said, "Well, if you don't need me, I'll run along." And Hector thought, "He's done his duty. He's dying to get away. It isn't here that he wants to be. It's with that girl."

The elevator appeared again and Philip said, "I'll be late, but I have my key. You'd better go to bed right off." The door closed and he was gone. The old man wanted to cry out, "Don't go! Don't leave me!" But he was only silent and all at once he felt so dizzy that he was forced to sit on the great carved chest. His thoughts were all confused. He was not quite sure that it was not Philip's father, Patrick Dantry, who had just left to run off with Nancy. But in a moment he remembered again that he was old and fat and ill and that all that story had happened nearly thirty years ago.

It was thus that Soames found him when he pussy-footed through the hall. The valet fetched a glass of whiskey and stared at him with a look so intent that old Hector cried out in annoyance, "I'm not dead yet! I'm all right. Don't bother me. You're not going to be out of a job." And then more quietly, "Tell the servants to go to bed and don't wait up for Mr. Philip."

And Soames went out, asking himself for the hundredth time if he shouldn't speak to Mr. Philip about the old man. He seemed a little queer in the head lately. There were times when he thought the old man was thinking of doing something terrible.

When Soames had gone, Hector rose from the chest thinking bitterly, "Those others, all but Savina, who is old too like myself, are going down into the city to live. Philip's going to his girl and Melbourn has those two women fighting over him, and the talk is that Jim Towner's keeping a night club singer." He wanted passionately

to follow each of them to see what happened to them after they passed through his door.

To reach his own room he had to pass the door of the elevator and on his way he noticed a bit of paper lying on the polished floor. He would have passed it save that he recognized the bit of paper torn from the bridge score. Mrs. Wintringham must have dropped it by accident in the elevator and it had blown out when it came up again for Philip. Holding to the handle of the door to steady himself, he stooped to pick it up. Opening it he read, "Wait for me at home. I'll come, no matter how late. I must talk to you."

So after all, he thought, it was poor distracted Fanny who had lost to that strange, fey woman who was a nobody. And then the past reclaimed him once more—Nancy and Patrick and the sudden terrible telegram of his death in the crevasse near Grindelwald and Savina in old Juliana Sloane's orchard at Staatsburg and the parties at Newport and the winters in Rome. Newport was filled with new and vulgar people and nobody spent winters in Rome any longer. He was an old man. He might as well be dead.

CHAPTER II

IT was after eleven when Jim Towner left old Hector's party and descended in the gilt and crystal elevator. In the hall below he was greeted by the doorman whose name was Pat Healy and who wore a livery of dull mulberry trimmed with gold lace and braid which was as

elegant and as expensive as the apartment house itself. He was a big fellow with powerful shoulders and a stomach that had come to him since he had turned forty as the price of easy living and great good nature. He grinned a great deal and had a great popularity no matter where he found himself. Noticing Jim Towner's bloodshot eyes and his unsteady gait, he smiled and said encouragingly, "Your car, Mr. Towner?"

But Jim Towner shook his handsome bull-like head and replied, "I'm not using my car."

"A taxi?"

"No, thanks. I'll walk. The air will do me good." He started off uncertainly and then, turning as if he had forgotten something, he asked, "How's the asthma, Pat?"

"Better, sir. It's always better in cold weather." He continued to regard Jim Towner with a discreet anxiety and again, tactfully and with good humor, he said, "It's a bad night. Hadn't I better call a taxi?"

"No, I'm all right. I was feeling ill. I've had indigestion lately. The air will do me good." He started off through the door and then turning again as if he'd forgotten something said, "Look after that asthma, Pat. Asthma's a bad thing."

Pat grinned at him and turned the revolving door slowly. "Thank you, Mr. Towner. I will."

With the proper degree of discretion Pat Healy waited in the shadow of one of the great columns by the door until he saw that Jim Towner had crossed the street safely. It was lucky, he thought, that there weren't many motors about on such a night, with a howling wind and the snow

flying in every direction. A fellow as tipsy as that oughtn't to be wandering off alone into such a storm.

When Jim Towner had disappeared into Fifty-seventh Street, Pat went inside once more.

"We're gonna be well snowed up in the morning," he said to the elevator man.

"Yeah, like as not you'll never get back to Corona."

He said this deliberately to torment Pat because Pat had a new wife waiting for him in Corona and the wife might be having a baby at any moment.

Looking about to see that there was no one in sight, Pat took out a cigarette and offered one to the elevator man. In silence they lighted the cigarettes and then Pat said, "He's a nice fella, Mr. Towner. It's a pity he gets like that so much lately."

The elevator man regarded the tip of his cigarette with an immense concentration. "You know what *I* think, Pat? *I* think most of 'em don't have enough to do and it gets on their nerves."

By "them" he meant all that stream of men and women, young and old, eager and handsome, battered and weary, who passed in and out of the door of Berkshire House. He and Pat knew all the people who lived there and most of those who came and went as guests and callers. They read without self-consciousness the columns in the cheaper newspapers devoted to the doings of the rich and fashionable and sometimes gaudy world in which they played the rôle of spectators.

"Lookit Mrs. Bartow and Mr. Tevis," observed the elevator man. "It's jist the same with them." He leaned

a little nearer and said in a low voice, "Ye know what I think? I think *she* takes drugs."

"Yeah, if they had to spend eight hours of the day workin' they'd be spendin' the rest o' their time at somethin' besides drinkin' and whorin' around. New York ain't no place for a man without a steady job."

"It's a shame . . . a nice fella like Mr. Towner . . . always got a nice word for everybody."

"Yeah, that's what I say . . . a guy like that that's got everything a fella could want."

They fell into a silence, brooding over the goings-on in the world that paraded past them, and presently Healy began to think about the little house in Corona and Esther waiting for him. It was a good thing, this being married and settled down. It was all well enough to be wild when you were young, finding girls all over the place but there came an age when it didn't go so big any more. A fella had to begin thinking of his health and regular hours and building a solid life for his old age and having kids that could look out for him when he was too old to work. What would the old man do now if it hadn't been for his children?

At this thought Pat felt a little ashamed because he hadn't done anything to help his old man. And his brothers Tim and Jerry only made trouble for him. It was Pat's sister Rosie who did everything. She was the one who'd kept the old man out of the poorhouse on Blackwell's Island. It was Rosie who looked after all of them and kept them out of trouble. And nowadays Rosie was famous and didn't call herself Rosie Healy any more but

Rosa Dugan and had a night club named after her . . . "Rosa's Place."

Pat allowed his thoughts to wander lazily.

He used to worry about Rosie and her way of living until that night when she sat him down in the corner of her room and said, "Look here, Pat. I'm sick of you and all the rest of my damned family pickin' on me for the way I live. I've got just as good a right to be wild as you have or Tim or Jerry and anyway I've never done anything like Tim that they could put me in jail for." Even if she was a woman, she'd got a right to be wild. He'd been wild, hadn't he? Chasin' after any woman that tickled his fancy? Well, she'd never run after a man. It was the men that did all the running, and they had to pay for it. In the end she'd straighten out all right and she'd be a rich and prosperous woman. God knows, somebody in the family would have to make some money to keep the old man off Blackwell's Island and Tim out of jail.

She sounded so sensible that he thought maybe she was right. Maybe it was better to be comfortable and have money in her pocket and have an automobile than to be standing all day on swollen feet in a place like Macy's basement the way Esther had done, always feeling too tired to have any fun. It was a funny thing about life and pretty darned hard to decide what was right and what was wrong. After all Rosie never had much of a chance, getting started off on the wrong foot by having a baby when she was seventeen, and then she was so good-looking and looked so well all dressed up. You couldn't blame her for liking clothes and jewelry. Maybe

it was all the fault of that wop Tony Bruzzi who got her into trouble and then was sent off to Sing-Sing. It was funny how crazy she was about him, being willing to go to jail herself if she could help him.

She must be crazy about him still, because when he asked her once if she'd ever heard of him again she lost her temper and said, "Let him alone, see? I don't wanna talk about him. That's my business. You forget it." And a woman who looked the way she looked when she said that must have been crazy about the little wop even though she hadn't seen him in years.

No, maybe Rosie was right. Maybe she was meant for that kind of a life. She had a lot of money now and had a night club named after her and she was generous with the old man and was always keeping Tim out of jail and she'd bought himself and Esther a little house out in Corona. No, it was damned hard. Maybe Rosie had gone wrong, but she was happy and she'd made a lot of other people happy.

The next night he had off, he decided that he'd rent a dress suit and go to Rosa's Place and hear Rosie sing. She must be awfully good to make such a hit. Funny when nobody ever knew she could sing at all.

Aloud he said, "Life's a funny thing, Bert."

"Yeah, it's a funny thing. I was thinkin' so myself. The old man's gettin' crankier every day."

"Your old man?"

"Naw, my old man's been dead for ten years. Naw. I mean old Champion up on the twentieth. He's been gettin' worse and worse lately."

"Oh, *him*," said Pat and a rich scorn colored his voice.

"Yeah. To-night he bawled Hell outa me because the elevator was a minute late."

"He's always been an old bastard. I never heard anybody have a good word for him. My uncle used to be his coachman when the old man lived in Thirty-sixth Street. That was a Hell of a long time ago. In the days of carriages."

"Yeah . . . a long while ago."

"Seems longer'n it is."

"Yeah . . . a lot longer. I guess it's because everything moves so damned fast in this bloomin' town."

And Pat fell to thinking again of the house in Corona and Esther who would hear him come in and get up and make something hot for him to eat when he got home at two. It was funny to think that any day now there'd be two people waiting for him instead of one and that the other one would be half Esther and half himself. He began to feel warm and have a sensation of swelling up inside. He wondered whether it would be a boy or a girl. If it was a boy they'd call it Patrick and if it was a girl they'd call it Rosie. It gave him a warm excited feeling. He sat and stared in front of him.

The cigarette burned his fingers and the elevator man said, "What the Hell are you grinnin' about?"

"Nothing," said Pat. "I was just thinkin'." How could he tell Bert, who wasn't even married, what he was thinking about? It was something you couldn't understand if it hadn't happened to you. It made you feel big

13267

and settled and important. It might happen any minute now. It might even happen to-night.

With a good deal of care and concentration Jim Towner kept going doggedly west through Fifty-seventh Street, leaning against the wild blizzard and filling his big chest with long draughts of the cold snow-damped air. It was almost as good as an icy bath, especially after all the boredom and feminine nonsense of Hector's dinner party. Being alone with one woman was all right but being surrounded by women made him feel like a bull in a china shop.

He had pulled his soft gray hat far over his eyes and turned the collar of his coat high to keep out the wind and the falling snow. He felt all blurry in his mind and his thoughts kept churning about in a ridiculous fashion so that he couldn't think out anything in a straight line. He would have one thought and then before he could realize it another would take its place. He simply bent his head and let his mind wander. It was as if he were partly asleep.

Just beyond Lexington Avenue he halted suddenly, aware that he had almost knocked down an old woman. For a moment he stood staring at her not quite certain whether he was awake or whether this was something which he was dreaming. She was old and thin and bent, with a tiny weazened face almost entirely hidden by a ragged old shawl. Her feet were wrapped in sacking. She was bending over a heap of rubbish, pulling about the old tin cans and the garbage, searching for something.

She took no notice of him. Slowly his mind cleared a little and at once an old habit asserted itself. Whenever he found himself in the face of calamity or felt sorry for some one his instinct told him to give money, perhaps because it was the only thing he had to give. With unsteady fingers he unbuttoned his coat and, searching in his pockets, found a ten-dollar bill. But she was so absorbed in her search that he had to shout at her. He thrust the money at her and then felt an impulse to run away as rapidly as possible, but she didn't take the bill at first and only stared at him, and when she did take it, she took his gloved hand with it, pinching it with a force unbelievable in so old and battered a creature. He couldn't tear himself loose and run. She kept mumbling to herself and crying out, "God bless you, mister!"

Then suddenly she freed him and, balancing himself uncertainly, he said with a grand manner, "It's nothing, my good woman." He meant to say more but could not remember what it was he meant to say, and turning suddenly he went on his way, feeling awkward and ashamed of himself.

As he walked he began telling himself that it was awful that such poverty existed in a city so rich and magnificent. Something ought to be done about it. He'd speak to Savina. You could count on old Savina. She'd do something about it. He ought to have taken the name and the address of the old woman, but maybe she was just somebody's mother and didn't have any name or address and just slept in a cellar or under the bridge.

He turned back to speak to her again, but by the time

he had reached the garbage heap, the old woman had disappeared. He could discover no sign of her. There weren't even any footprints in the snow so far as he could see, although he could still see his own footprints half obliterated by the blowing snow. A cat looked at him out of a doorway over which was painted in faded lettering, "Family Entrance." He turned and the cat, arching its back and hissing at him, disappeared.

For a second he could not remember whither he was bound and, leaning against the railing of an areaway, he told himself that what he needed was another drink. It was the only thing that could drive off the beginning of a horrible depression. He set out again going straight west toward Rosa's Place and suddenly he felt a little better. The cold air was clearing his head a little.

At Fifth Avenue he turned south, feeling vaguely that there was something strange and lonely in the spectacle of a great avenue lighted from end to end, empty and filled with blowing snow. It frightened him because he was a man who could not well support solitude and found himself content and at ease only in crowds and among friends. He had no inner life but only a life which responded to influences from the outside and he never thought either of his soul or of his character because these things, like all the material elements of his existence, had always seemed arranged for him and determined before he was born, and so when he was alone, he did not know what to do with himself except to drink or to sleep. The midnight emptiness of a thoroughfare which existed in his mind as a place filled with shops and people brought back the

sense of depression and drove him despite himself into thinking of things which usually he was able to chuck aside and forget.

As he walked he began to see what he already knew and would not admit—that his life had become a colossal muddle and that everything in it of solidity was falling to pieces about him. He knew that something ought to be done about it but he couldn't think what it could be. The wreck, he told himself drunkenly, had happened so slowly, like a ship breaking up in quicksands, that he'd been unaware of it until it was almost too late. In a sudden flash of clarity he tried to tell himself that it was really all his fault, but the same clarity of mind wouldn't allow him to believe this. The gentlemanly thing to do was to take all the blame but, try as he might, he couldn't quite do it.

He told himself that he'd neglected Fanny for a good many years but what could you expect of a man when his wife liked parties made up of queer people—writers who wore clothes spotted with food and got drunk on the mere smell of whiskey cork, cheap actors, and bad painters and a lot of people who were just hangers-on and talked about art and philosophy and other nonsense. They didn't like him and he couldn't blame them for that. What could he say to them? The trouble was that they didn't like Fanny either. They probably called her a lion-hunter behind her back, but they came to the house because they liked a good meal and because with all their arty talk, they were infernal little snobs and second-rate snobs at that. They liked knowing Mrs. Towner and going to her

house in Park Avenue. Anybody but Fanny could see that.

He began to talk to himself, feeling grandiose and eloquent and filled with virtue and common sense. Aloud he said, "The trouble is that the whole lot of them are just as untidy inside their heads as they are outside. Why don't they have a little healthy sex instead of talking about their scrawny love affairs? I don't wanta hear about them."

He told himself that they had affairs with the damnedest looking women clanking with art jewelry and then told you all about it, as if you gave a damn what happened to any of them. Some of Fanny's parties made him think of lines filled with badly washed clothes fluttering in the wind. It was such a half-baked, second-rate world and Fanny thought it was all brilliant and clever. Well, maybe one in fifty amounted to something, but the other forty-nine were a ratty lot, or maybe he himself wasn't bright enough to see how clever they were. What could you expect when your wife liked that sort of a life and you liked horses and . . . well . . . pretty women maybe more than you ought to?

At St. Thomas's corner he crossed the street carefully, noticing vaguely that the snow was already heaped high in the beautiful doorway of the church.

Stumbling along he kept asking himself what had happened to Fanny. She wasn't like that when he had married her. She wasn't like that even a few years ago when she was past thirty and should have settled down a bit. It was only lately that she'd begun to talk about the emptiness of her life, as if two children and a husband and all

the friends she had among decent, civilized people weren't enough to make her life pretty full.

Into the midst of his thoughts out of nowhere somebody cried, "Hello, Jim!" He turned but he could see no one, and then on the opposite side of the street he made out the figure of a man walking rapidly in the opposite direction. He tried dully to discover who it was and failing, because of the blowing snow, turned slowly on his way again.

He and Fanny would have to get together again, no matter what happened, or it would be the end of them both. And it would be a shame to see a nice girl like Fanny going to the devil because she was nearly forty and had to hurry. Already she didn't seem to care what people said or thought of her.

The man who had spoken to him, whoever he was, would probably go about to-morrow saying, "It's too bad about Jim Towner. I saw him again last night, reeling drunk." He told himself he wasn't really drunk. It was funny how gossip got around a city as big as New York. Still nobody had heard about Rosie. He had that to be thankful for. Rosie was a good girl. She knew how to make a man happy and when she loved you it was the most natural thing in the world. She didn't act like Fanny as if it was something to be ashamed of.

Walking more slowly he began to peer at the fronts of the brownstone houses that extended out of sight into the falling snow, each exactly and monotonously alike. He passed one after another uncertainly until he came to one which had in the window a sign which read

MADAME ELLINE, MODES. He turned into the areaway. Another drink was what he needed.

He rang the bell and waited but there was no answer and as he stood there leaning against the iron grill that covered the window, he saw by the dim light that there were stains in the snow just beside the door where the areaway was protected from the wind. . . . He rang again, and, examining the stains with an idle interest, he discovered with a sudden disagreeable certainty that they were blood. Some one had fallen or been bleeding from the nose.

Then the door behind the iron grill opened and a face peered out.

"It's me, Towner," said Jim.

A voice which he recognized answered, "We was just closin', Mister Towner. I'm sorry. We was just closin'."

Jim Towner's thick voice grew angry. "All I want is a freshener. I'm not going to stay."

"Wait a minute, I'll see," said the voice and disappeared. Again Jim Towner fell to studying the red spots on the snow and in a moment the door creaked open and he went in through the basement hall into a room which had once been the servants' hall of this respectable brownstone house. It was a sad room with walls covered by faded brown paper on which stains and spots showed in the cold, brilliant glare from the unshaded lights. There were three tables and some chairs and a battered upright piano. The man who had opened the door had an egg-shaped white head covered with red fuzz and pale cold fish-like eyes.

He had narrow shoulders and grotesquely fat hips and wore a white apron over his blue-purple suit.

Jim Towner looked at him with drunken distaste. "Kind of dead to-night, Frank."

"Yes. Kinda dead to-night. It ain't much of a night for trade. What'll you have?"

"Whiskey soda."

Frank disappeared and Jim Towner began again to worry about Fanny. He tried to think of her as she had been when he married her. That was a great wedding. Everybody had a good time. All the boys from the club singing and drinking. *They* were the boys who could drink. None of these weak-kneed little microbes in thick spectacles.

He felt a sudden nostalgia for the good old days when he had been the most popular man of his class. He wanted to feel the boys slapping his back and saying, "Good old Jim!" All that had slipped away somehow, imperceptibly without his noticing it until it was gone, leaving him lonely and unimportant. He couldn't even play good polo any more since he'd begun to grow heavy.

Fanny was all right in those days and thought him the only man in the world, but now, when he came to think of it, he couldn't think why he had married her, except that she seemed suitable and was pretty and every one thought it was a good marriage. He'd never had for her the feeling he had for Rosie which was a good solid feeling of passion. He'd never wanted to be with Fanny the way he wanted to be with Rosie, day in and day out.

Well, maybe some of the mess was his fault. Maybe he'd let her find out that he wasn't the most wonderful fellow in the world. Funny that she should like a bounder like Melbourn who was a nobody and had no friends and no clubs, and wasn't even a gentleman.

He began to grow impatient because Frank was so long bringing the whiskey. Through his irritation he heard a voice in the back room saying, "It ain't no use. Anybody can see there ain't nothin' to be done."

"Finished?" asked another voice.

"Finished."

"Poor Sam. An' he was only talkin' to-night about givin' up the racket for good."

One of the voices was lowered. "Who done it?"

"You know damned well who done it."

"Dago Tony?"

"Sure. They got Dusty Moran the same way . . . outov a taxicab window. They musta been waitin' down the street."

"The dirty bastards!"

"Well, he ain't Lucky Sam any more."

There was a sound of ice being cracked and then the first voice again. "He bled like a stuck pig."

"Yeah. One bullet musta got him through the big artery."

"Gawd. It was terrible."

Then there was the sound of a glass being set on a tray.

"You'd better get out there with a bucket and some water. We don't want no traces left."

"What are you gonna do with him?"

"Well, he ain't quite dead yet."

"No . . . but after."

"We can put him in Harry's taxi and drop him some place in the Bronx or over by the river mebbe. You could drop him any place on a night like this."

"They'll just think somebody took him for a ride."

Frank appeared suddenly in the doorway, crossed over and put the whiskey down in front of Jim Towner. Jim looked up and asked, "What's the matter?"

"Nothin's the matter. A guy that was tight fell downstairs and bumped his head."

Jim put two dollars on the table and said, "Keep it." He didn't ask any more questions because he was muddled and wasn't sure what he heard.

A man passed along the hallway carrying a broom, some rags and a pail of water.

Frank asked, "D'you want anything else, Mr. Towner?"

"No."

Frank turned and went out of the room and from outside the window there came a sound of scrubbing.

He lighted a cigarette which tasted badly and took another drink, forgetting the half-muddled conversation and the sound of scrubbing in the anxiety which the thought of Melbourn always aroused.

He tried not to think of Melbourn and like a child kept trying to push the idea of him away as if by doing so he could annihilate Melbourn. He tried over and over again to make himself believe that there was really nothing serious between Fanny and Melbourn, but something deep inside him wouldn't allow him to believe it, and so the

anxiety would not be stifled. He disliked the truth more because its existence made him seem ridiculous and ungentlemanly than because of any jealousy. He really did not care what Fanny did so long as she did not make a spectacle of them both, but he knew that a gentleman should do something about his wife's honor and his own but he could not think what it was that ought to be done.

He'd never spoken of it to Fanny but then, he told himself, it was the sort of thing you couldn't mention casually as you did the weather, and for years now he and Fanny had never spoken of anything more intimate or profound than the weather or where they were dining or spending a week-end. He saw for the first time how far apart they were and that they had become really like strangers. If only she'd been content to spend most of the time in the country leading a healthy life with horses and golf and the children, things might have been better, but she had always to be coming back to this cursed city to rush from one thing to another with her nerves on edge, as if she were trying to find something, God alone knew what. She was always afraid of missing something. He saw that they had different friends now and liked different things and even had different thoughts which they shut away from each other in a kind of hostile secrecy. They didn't even care enough to have violent quarrels. It was all just dead, inert, a mockery. You couldn't count Fanny's liking for melodramatic scenes under the head of quarreling. Fanny liked working herself into a temper. All women, he supposed, were like that . . . all women but Rosie.

He wondered with a sudden shocking detachment

whether she made scenes with Melbourn as she had done with him all his life. It struck him that Melbourn wasn't the sort who would put up with nonsense and he wouldn't run away from scenes either the way he himself had always done. And it occurred to him suddenly that if he had cared enough to knock the nonsense out of Fanny instead of merely running away from it, things might be better off now.

The whiskey warmed him and at first it made his head seem much clearer. He was aware that the iron grill had banged shut again and that a figure bearing a broom, a bucket and some rags had passed through the hall once more to the back of the house. He couldn't see the water in the bucket but he knew with a disagreeable certainty that it was red. And again he heard the voice in the next room beyond the shabby curtain.

"It's all over."

"He didn't want no priest?"

"What would a Jew want with a priest?"

Then there was a mumble of low voices and one of them said, "Aw, he's too tight to hear anything."

All at once he felt sick and dizzy and, rising, he went out quickly through the corridor into the street. The floor of the areaway was all clear of snow now, freshly washed and scrubbed. The stains had disappeared. He hurried up the steps and, bending his head against the storm, started west once more.

As he walked everything seemed to become clear again. He decided that the manly thing to do was to take the matter in hand and act firmly . . . now . . . to-morrow

. . . before it was too late and something dreadful happened which would smash both their lives and those of the children as well. He'd go to Fanny to-morrow at tea time and say to her, "I've been in the wrong, but both of us have got to pull ourselves together and try to make a go of it for our own sakes as well as for the children. It's them we've got to think of. We're getting so old it doesn't matter what happens to us but they're just beginning to live. I'll do whatever you say, even to putting up with the queer people you have to the house."

And then he knew at once that everything he planned to say was wrong. She'd say that because the children had all of life before them and she had only a few more years of youth the right was hers to get the most out of life she could. And when he said they were growing old she would fly into a temper and make a scene and when he spoke of her "queer people" it would be the end of everything and they'd be worse off than before. He knew what she'd do. She'd turn and twist everything he said so that it meant something else and manage to make him appear a brute and herself a martyr. She'd call all his friends half witted and stupid who had remained undergraduates all their lives. He saw that this tea time conference would come to nothing.

Perhaps the only thing to do was to give up Rosie and he told himself that giving her up would be worth all it cost him if by doing it he could have a happy, peaceful home which he could properly call his own. He kept telling himself insistently that for all Fanny's foolish notions there was something damned fine about her. She always

showed her worst side and made a fool of herself but underneath she was solid gold. It would be all right if only he could break down all the things that separated them before it was too late.

If he gave up Rosie he'd try going back to live with Fanny again, trying to love her the way a man ought to love his wife and not the way a man loved a woman like Rosie, because the two things were different of course. But it would be damned hard because Fanny always managed to take all the fun out of making love and with Rosie it was a wild uproarious affair in which everybody had a good time. After love with Rosie he couldn't quite picture any satisfaction in the love of Fanny. That was the trouble. In this love business there wasn't any turning back. You had to go on and on, finding something new and better and more exciting. That was the worst of it. You just went on and on until you ended God knew where. Respectable love would be hard after knowing Rosie. But maybe he wouldn't really have to go back to Fanny and maybe he wouldn't really have to give up Rosie.

And suddenly he found himself all muddled again, with no way out of the puzzle. He kept seeing Rosie standing on a table in a circle of yellow light singing to a night club filled with people or in the flat in Thirty-ninth Street just behind Savina's house (only Savina never guessed what was going on there). It was Rosie who made him feel wild and young again as he'd been in college. Fanny was like something made up but Rosie was flesh and blood, warm flesh and blood.

As he drew nearer and nearer to Rosie the last drink of

whiskey began to have its effect. The awful dinner at Hector Champion's faded into the distant past and the little table in the corner behind the screen with Rosie and a bottle of whiskey became more and more real. That was a world in which there wasn't any nonsense. Everything was clear-cut and simple and everybody meant what they said and everybody was out for a good time and Rosie, in the midst of it all, was the life of the party. He began to feel hungry for Rosie. She'd make him feel better.

In the falling snow just before him there appeared a blaze of light all softened and diffused which took form as he drew near and spelled out the words, ROSA'S PLACE. The big doorman recognized him and said, "Good evening, Mr. Wilson."

For a moment he felt a drunken impulse to quarrel, saying that his name was not Wilson but Towner, and then he remembered dully that in Rosie's world he was "Mr. Wilson."

Inside he found himself confronted by the familiar curtains of red velour and for a moment he struggled desperately with their folds to find the opening. The doorman found it for him and held the curtains aside. The cloakroom girl smiled at him and said, "Good evening, Mr. Wilson. Not much of an evening."

She helped him to struggle out of his coat.

He looked at himself in the mirror to make certain that his tie was straight and his coat in order. Beyond more red curtains some one was playing a piano, softly, effortlessly, with a kind of intoxicating carelessness. Then some one began to sing in a low, warm throaty voice which was

a little husky. It was an odd voice which sent shivers up and down the spine of Jim Towner and of a good many other men who sat in the club beyond the red curtains.

It sang,

"If I could find the man I'm looking for."

A new kind of excitement much stronger than the excitement of the raw whiskey warmed his whole body. He was luckier than poor Fanny because he'd found what he had always been seeking. He fumbled impatiently with the curtains and then, pulling them open, he saw her.

She was sitting on the edge of a table in the middle of the floor drenched in a shower of warm yellow light. Behind her in the shadows were the gray indistinct faces of people sitting at tables. The men in the jazz band sat listening, holding their instruments on their knees. She sat with her head tilted back a little, and her eyes partly closed, singing effortlessly in a voice that was no voice at all. She wore a rather soiled gown of white satin and a great many diamonds on the right arm and seemed indifferent to all the people who sat about at the tables watching her. It was as if she were quite alone, singing. In the smelly, garish room packed with people there was not a sound. They were all listening. The strangely moving voice sang,

"I'd give them all to some other girl
If I could find the man I'm looking for."

No, he couldn't give up Rosie. It would be like asking him to die.

CHAPTER III

FROM the moment that old Savina Jerrold, fat and shapeless and sixty-seven, stepped into Hector's drawing-room and saw Mrs. Wintringham, there was no one else, save perhaps Melbourn who always set her to thinking, in whom she had the faintest interest. And when she exchanged with Mrs. Wintringham that sudden look of understanding, the interest was sealed and destined to become permanent. Savina was old and experienced and her colossal zest for life had begun to wane a little and she knew that people who interest you at first do not always possess enough of substance to make further intimacy either desirable or of profit. She knew that the well sometimes went dry all too soon and that frequently an intimacy which promised much came suddenly to an end because there was no more exploring to do. And Savina had a way of seizing, exploring and exhausting people which had become a perfect habit. The glance showed her that Mrs. Wintringham was aware of what had been happening all about her and that she possessed the armor of aloofness which kept her untouched either by the colossal boredom of Hector's ill-assorted dinner or by the direct attack of Fanny Towner. It showed her too that there were depths in Mrs. Wintringham, lying one beneath another, which perhaps few people had discovered. There were, she suspected, several Mrs. Wintringhams.

But there was another fascination more profound than

mere curiosity. It was as if Mrs. Wintringham were the apotheosis of all that Savina would have chosen to be if she could have been born again. For Mrs. Wintringham was handsome and Savina had always been big and plain and awkward. Mrs. Wintringham had an armor of reserve which protected her against the casual barbs of existence and poor Savina possessed only a touching and impulsive warmth which all her life had led her to throw herself without calculation into relationships from which she emerged bruised and hurt and puzzled. It was only after she had passed middle age that she managed to protect herself by a manner of bluff directness which was never quite convincing. Mrs. Wintringham's life, Savina suspected, was what she had always desired her own life to be.

Because she, like old Hector, had been born into a world in which her future was perfectly ordered, regulated and fenced in by traditions, formalities and duties, she envied women like Ruby Wintringham the recklessness of a life which appeared to be free of all these things. Long ago when Savina was young, there had been times when she yearned passionately to be rid of all her cousins and aunts and uncles, from the houses which bored her and from a world which seemed to her immersed and deadened by the protective monotony of ritual. At such times she had succumbed to fits of violent depression which her family only labeled lightly and conveniently "the sulks." By taking no notice of "the sulks" the uncles and cousins and aunts had managed slowly and effectively to stifle their cause—a passionate and un-Jerrold-like hunger for rebellion

and escape. By opposing her they might have driven her into open action and so into salvation from the shallow tragedy which was the sum of her futile life, but they only treated her as if she were a little queer and a strange Jerrold who must be humored. And Savina herself, on the edge of rebellion, always found herself fenced in by the most intangible and unconquerable difficulties.

She wanted to escape but she did not know where to escape to. If she had been born in the south or in the west she told herself that she might have escaped to New York, or if she had been born in Europe she might have escaped to America. She once tried escaping to Europe for a year and a half and finding that since there was no real place for her there save in the world of society, she had grown bored and returned. Europe was an evasion which did not appeal to her energetic nature. And she could not escape from New York to New York because so long as she remained in the city, no matter if she sought lodgment in the filthiest tenement on the east side, there would always be cousins and aunts and uncles who would keep calling upon her to see how she was getting on, watching her, commenting on her queerness, blocking everything she attempted to do, and trying sweetly but firmly to drag her back into her proper circle. Wherever she turned there seemed to be no way out. She would have enjoyed a good battle but there was no chance for such a thing because the forces she always found opposing her were so tenuous and indistinct that there was nothing to fight. It was like being smothered by rose petals. Family, wealth, prestige, and all the things which good fairies are supposed to bestow upon

good children were simply poison to Savina. From the age of twenty, when her coming out was recognized as a definite failure, she had wanted only freedom and anonymity.

And so in the end she had made a compromise by trying to interest herself in charities and giving money to orchestrás and in working for woman suffrage, which did not interest her very much because she was so great an individualist that she cared little whether other women voted or not and secretly believed that if they did vote it would do no more than confuse an already colossal confusion. She was born too soon to have found an outlet for her energies as the head of a business which was clearly the destiny designed by God and Nature for her plain body and her intelligent brain. The thing she could never escape was the fact that she was a Jerrold. What she panted for, as she discovered when she was old, was the blessing of having been born plain Mary Smith of some vague half-charted portion of the country. Then she could have had fun. Then she could have felt that she was really American.

At sixty-seven it seemed to her that all her life had been frittered away in an endless round of nonsense, and so Ruby Wintringham, handsome, self-possessed, successful and of an origin utterly unknown, was a kind of goddess to her.

Because she, like Hector who went about staring morbidly into people's faces, had never really lived on her own, she now had a passionate desire to live vicariously. She wanted to know Mrs. Wintringham more intimately and to extract from her the details of her existence, and so to imagine that they were the details of her own life.

When Pat Healy shouted into the storm, "Miss Jerrold's motor!" there appeared out of the flying snow a very high old-fashioned limousine with small wheels, driven by a plump old gentleman with red cheeks who in the days before motors had been the Jerrold family coachman and shared with his mistress a distrust of motors which led him to drive always at a discreet pace as if the clumsy old-fashioned vehicle were some spirited beast which might easily get out of control and run off with his mistress and himself.

The two women climbed in and sat on the high seat beneath a light which Savina always kept burning so that her limousine had the appearance of a traveling waxwork. They turned northward, the one woman young, slim and beautiful, the other fat, grotesque and old, priding herself that she was not like Hector, a snob who never really got to know people like Mrs. Wintringham.

"Now that the ice is broken we must meet again," she said, laying a hand on Mrs. Wintringham's fur coat. "I've heard so much about you from all sorts of people. Philip's been telling me about you for a year or more. You appear to be quite the thing nowadays. Philip's a nice young man." (Savina said this to see whether Mrs. Wintringham displayed any matrimonial interest in him.)

"He's a nice young man," said Ruby Wintringham, "but very serious. He makes me feel very old."

"Tosh! He's older than you are." (This was completely insincere.)

"I'm thirty-four."

"Philip is . . . Let me see . . . It's twenty-six years

since his father ran off with his aunt—I was just thinking of that. Let me see, Philip must be twenty-eight."

"Did his father run off with his aunt?"

"Yes. Philip's aunt, I mean. It wasn't incestuous, although it does sound a bit Greek. His father ran away with his wife's sister . . . Old Hector's sister too. It's all very complicated and it was very unpleasant. She's the one who's coming home now. Aunt Nancy. She left her husband to run off with Philip's father after Philip's mother died. She was Mrs. Carstairs and a great belle, very beautiful. Of course you wouldn't know about it. You were scarcely born then and you aren't a New Yorker. That's the reason she's never been home in twenty-five years . . . a quarter of a century. That's a long time. But Philip *is* a nice boy. He comes and calls on me regularly, although I'm old enough to be his grandmother. Sometimes I worry about him because he's too nice. People like that invite tragedy. They haven't any protections against the world. He's in love with an actress now and I hope she's a decent woman because if she isn't he'll take it very hard. He tells me she's wonderful, but a man in love is the last person to judge. Her name is Janie Fagan."

"Oh, Janie Fagan!"

"Do you know her?"

"Not really."

"You spoke as if you knew something about her."

"No, I don't know anything."

What Ruby said was true and yet it was a lie. She didn't *know* anything about Janie Fagan and yet she did know something. She kept seeing Janie Fagan suddenly as she'd

seen her once years before on the only occasion she'd ever encountered her off the stage. It was in the time when Ruby Wintringham herself was still a nobody, feeling her way upward toward success. She kept seeing Janie Fagan in a big studio in the Fifties where she'd been taken to a party given by an actor called Douglas Kane. She remembered thinking that Janie Fagan was cheap and a little common and she remembered thinking, "She's living with that man." She'd forgotten it all until this moment when it all returned to her with an extraordinary clarity. While Savina talked on she thought, "Janie Fagan is just the kind that would capture a nice young fellow like Philip." She stifled an impulse to say, "I know Janie Fagan. She's not the kind for him." After all it was not her business whether Philip married Janie Fagan or not. She had no right to interfere with the success of Janie Fagan. She knew herself how hard it was to get on. She knew how people tried to do you in. Let Janie Fagan get what she wanted. She wouldn't be ruining any one. Philip was a fool probably to whom luck had given everything from the beginning and Janie Fagan had had to make her own way. And suddenly she saw that really she was on Janie Fagan's side ranged with all those who had to fight their own battles and that old Savina and Philip and people like that were on the other side.

She kept listening to Savina, aware that all Savina was telling her was of value because it helped her to feel at home in this world into which she had forced an entrance. It all helped to give her poise and make her feel at ease

in the midst of people like Fanny Towner and old Hector. If she'd known more of such gossip and chatter to-night Fanny Towner couldn't have gone on talking about people and things which she knew nothing about. She couldn't have shut her out as if she were an upstart and an intruder.

It was a process which had gone on for so long now that it had become a habit. All Savina's talk filtered into her clever brain, finding lodgment there, to be turned out when it became of use to her. She knew and she had long known that nothing was so valuable as knowing one's way about. When she was old—as old as Savina Jerrold—she would know everything there was to know of Savina's world and be as firmly fixed in it as the old lady herself . . . as firmly fixed in it as if she had been born a Jerrold instead of having been born in Manchuria, the daughter of a Methodist missionary named Banks.

She heard Savina saying, "Why not come in to tea to-morrow? I'm asking Lady Elsmore. That's Hector's sister, the one who ran off with Philip's father. He won't be nice to her and after twenty-five years she won't feel very much at home in New York."

"I'd love to come," said Ruby.

"Will you be in if I come to your shop to-morrow?"

"I'm always in until four."

"I'd have paid you a visit sooner but I always heard you were so expensive."

"We aren't really. It's only because we deal in rare and unique things."

"It must be pleasant having a business of your own,"

and there was a sudden wistfulness in the old woman's voice which struck Ruby as astonishing in a woman so rich.

"It means work and that you can't always be as free as you like."

"But it means being independent. Tell me, how did you happen to go into the business?"

"By accident as much as anything else. I always knew about Chinese things and then Mr. Quince asked me to work for him and now I'm a partner in the business."

"I'd have liked to have had a business like that, but I was born too soon. When I was young, girls didn't do such things."

The car was stopping now and Ruby, gathering her fur coat about her, said, "It was good of you to drop me."

"Nothing, my dear, nothing," said Savina abruptly and then, almost wistfully, "You'll come to-morrow?"

"Yes, I'd love to."

Ruby climbed down from the high motor and ran across the strip of carpet into the apartment.

Huddled in one corner under the light Savina began to have disturbing doubts. She was asking herself whether the girl was a minx or not, for she understood suddenly that while she had been talking constantly about herself and Philip and old Hector and Nancy Elsmore she had learned nothing whatever about Mrs. Wintringham. She wondered why the clever young woman should have said that she "knew about Chinese things always" and who Mr. Wintringham could have been and where was he now? And how she had met her partner, the celebrated con-

noisseur Mr. Quince, and just how deep was this friendship with Melbourn; and whether it was true that she had already been married three times. What had impressed old Hector as calm and mystery Savina suddenly suspected was only caution and calculation. There was something smooth and clever and assured about the girl which reminded her of some one else and it was not until the motor drew up before her own brownstone house that it occurred to her that Ruby Wintringham with her poise and assurance was like Melbourn.

She thought, "Both of them are on the make." But deep in her heart she envied them and wanted to be like them. "It would be so much more interesting to have gambled for success than to have had everything handed you on a silver platter. Anyway," she thought, "I like them both. They aren't people who lie down and whine."

And somehow the contact with Ruby Wintringham and Melbourn and the thought of them both made her feel young and strong. She wanted to go on and on, exploring more and more deeply, unearthing other Mrs. Wintringhams that lay beneath the smooth glittery surface. A woman with so subtle and lovely a face couldn't be as cold and as calculating as she appeared to be.

2

Savina shared a house on Murray Hill with Alida Parsons, who was two years older than herself and also unmarried. It was really Savina's house, which she had inherited from her father, and Alida had shared it with her since the day when both made the discovery that they were

perfectly suited to each other and that no man was likely to disturb the settled, placid stream of their days by offering to marry either of them. It was a big house for two people, built of ugly brownstone wider than any two houses in the street. It had an atrocious pseudo-Georgian façade with windows out of all proportion with the narrow stoop. Savina's father was the first of the New York bankers to become a power in the world. He wore side-whiskers and Wellington boots long after their day and was a great supporter of St. Bart's Church, whose yard made an open space at the back of his house. And when he died it was discovered that for twenty years he had had a comfortable life apart from his family with a plump middle-aged respectable lady to whom he left a million dollars.

It was straight to this house that Savina came after she had dropped Mrs. Wintringham at her flat in the Sixties. At the door she got down clumsily from the enormous old-fashioned limousine and irritably, aided by the chauffeur, she mounted the steps and was admitted by her old butler Henry, a family piece of some forty years' standing. The mere sight of Henry with his tall skinny body and his undertaker's face (he had always cherished an ambition to resign from service and attend an undertaking college but was hindered by an incapacity to read or write) and the sight of the familiar warm shabby hall filled her again with good-humor and made her forget her exasperation at her own physical clumsiness.

Savina's house and everything in it were monuments to family history and the happy habit of the years to deposit in one spot layer upon layer of old books and crimson carpets

and odd cushions and old-fashioned pictures, all warmed by associations of the past. It was a house touched by life just as Hector's flat was only an elegant museum where one moved about awed by the cold value of the impersonal objects it contained. To Savina each chair meant something personal and sentimental. To Hector each chair was a thing of beauty worth so many dollars in the market.

The hall was large and its walls were covered with marbleized paper. It was rather bare save for three quite bad family portraits to which Savina was attached. From the midst of it rose a spiral staircase which possessed a genuine beauty of proportion which must have been accidental in the period when the house was built. At the bottom of the stairway Henry helped her ponderously out of a sable coat with a frayed and ragged lining which was large enough to cover three ordinary women.

"Is Miss Parsons still up?" she asked. And when Henry answered "Yes," she said, "Tell her I'll be down shortly, and bring me some hot punch in the sitting-room and then go to bed."

The stairs creaked under her great weight. Hector told her that danger lurked in their old-fashioned construction and that she ought to have a lift put in. But her horror of being caught between floors in a lift was much greater than her fear of collapsing stairs. And it was a staircase whose acquaintance she had first made by tumbling down it at the age of two and in her heart she was certain it would never betray her.

In Savina's own room Lizzie, who was the wife of Henry and almost as old, helped her to remove the sack of black

satin tied in at the waist with a gold cord and the tight frivolous slippers which Savina when corseted could not bend down to reach, putting on in their place a large pair of felt slippers such as servants wear at their work. Then she had Lizzie with much effort remove her corsets and she put on a man's dressing-gown of camel's hair. When she had frizzed her thin hair before the mirror she told Lizzie to go to bed, lighted a cigarette and went downstairs.

In the sitting-room Alida was sitting beside the Victorian marble fireplace, looking very pink and pretty in the glow of the flames and the flickering light of the fire. She had very white hair and a small, delicate face, pink and covered with the tiny wrinkles which are the mark of age upon a skin that is too fine. Dressed in a *peignoir* made of yards of lace and pale blue ribbon and white fox, she sat working over a tapestry frame. At her side lay the two black Scotties, Tit and Tat, and a pile of newspapers neatly folded which she had perused earlier in the evening in search of deaths, births and marriages among people she knew, but above all in search of crimes in which the passions of love and jealousy played a large part. She had a way when talking of falling easily into French, for in her youth she had lived in Paris and ever since, perhaps through coquetry and affectation, she had spoken a kind of jargon made up of the two tongues. Such murders she spoke of always as *crimes passionnels*. At times she was as artificial as Savina was downright, but only Savina knew that this artificiality was born of shyness. Most people considered her merely affected and tiresome.

The whole room smelled faintly of the lavender which

Alida, who cared about such things, always threw upon the fire each evening. It was a smell which Savina loved because it always meant to her this warm comfortable room. Sometimes walking home on a winter evening she would suddenly become aware of it a block away, and unconsciously hurry on to arrive at the pretty old-fashioned room and the pleasant fire.

As Savina opened the door and saw Alida looking feminine and pretty the old sense of well-being smote her. All the evening she had said to herself, "I can endure this horrible party because I shall be going home afterward to a bright fire and comfortable slippers and Alida and the dogs." And now she was standing in the room, which seemed to glow, all gold and old rose, like a casket, about the prettiness of Alida. She felt suddenly that she never again wanted to exchange its charm and comfort for the wearisome social processes which people called pleasure. At that moment she became old and tired and comfortable and unwilling ever to quit the house again.

It was a pleasant shape, the room, long and not too narrow, with a platform at the far end where there was a bow window looking out over St. Bart's churchyard. Across the window the curtains were now drawn, shutting out all the blizzard and shutting in the soft warmth of the room. There were seven lamps and over the fireplace the romantic portrait by Lenbach of Aunt Juliana holding a bunch of edelweiss looked exactly right. In the corner stood a square cage and in it the parrot Katie sat swinging and muttering to herself.

At the sound of the door opening Alida looked up and

pushed her horn-rimmed spectacles down a little on her delicate nose. Savina said in her deep voice, "Oughtn't Katie to be covered and asleep?"

"She croaked and chortled so loud in the library that I thought she must be cold, so I brought her in here."

Savina went over to the cage and began to scratch the head bent toward her by the wise Katie. "You're a spoiled old bird," she said. The dogs looked at her and thumped their tails against the carpet without getting up. Alida, she reflected, was always weak with animals. She'd brought the bird in here just because she couldn't bear to think of it alone in the dark library.

"Well," said Alida impatiently, "what was the party?" She always declared that she wasn't strong enough to go out herself, but she forced Savina to accept all invitations so that she might keep in touch with all that was happening in the frivolous world.

"Awful," said Savina. "Awful." And she related who was there and how badly Fanny Towner had behaved. She said, "I think you ought to speak to Fanny, Alida. I don't know who else can do it. And after all she's your niece. She made a complete fool of herself to-night. I don't wonder that poor Jim has taken to drink."

Alida said nothing but implied by her silence that the Parsons family was above reproach, and Henry came in bearing the steaming punch, which he placed on the table by the fire. Savina seated herself comfortably in an enormous armchair, and placed her swollen feet on the seat of the chair opposite her so that the blood might run out of

them. She told Henry to open the curtains over the bow window. Nobody could look in from the churchyard and it increased her sense of comfort to sit by the warm fire with hot punch watching the snow whirling against the panes. Beyond the churchyard she saw the pink-yellow glow hanging above the city. It had turned silvery in the falling snow and out of the haze there emerged a gray tower, vague and ghostlike in the storm, its lower part picked out with faint lozenges of yellow light, its lanterns only a great spot of light like a moon seen through the smoky atmosphere of an autumn night. She thought suddenly of Aunt Juliana's house, which had once stood on the very spot where the great tower swept upward, filled with wires and lifts and the most complicated machinery. Aunt Juliana's house and her terrible red-carpeted receptions seemed as remote and unreal now as if they had been part of another existence and Savina reflected again that she didn't love New York any more because you couldn't love a piece of whirring machinery that respected nothing but noise and change.

She poured out a glass of punch and held it to her nose, sniffing sensuously the rich odor of steaming brandy and lemon and cloves. Alida asked, "Who is this Mrs. Wintringham?"

"I haven't the faintest idea. She has an antique shop and she seems to go about a good deal, but I don't know who she is or where she comes from." She drank some punch and Alida said, "It doesn't seem to matter much any more, as long as people are amusing. They might have

come out of jail the day before for all any one cares."

"She's an attractive woman, Alida. I've asked her to tea to-morrow."

Alida didn't say anything and Savina said, "I think there's something the matter with Hector. He looks as if he was dying and I think he must have something wrong in his head. Nobody in his right mind would have invited those people to dinner together."

"I've been saying that for a long time."

"I think it's hard on Philip . . . a boy like that to have to live with an old reprobate like Hector. I think Hector's a bad influence on anybody decent. I wish Philip would give up living with him. I wish he'd get married and escape."

"Hector certainly doesn't want him to marry anybody."

"There's something awful about Hector."

"What?"

"I don't know. It's something you feel. I think he'd put Philip up to any kind of filthiness just to pump him about it. Sometimes I think Hector ought to be shut up. I think the old fool had rouge on his cheeks to-night."

She saw that Alida was watching her sharply and understood that she was talking too much about Hector and too passionately, as if he made any difference to her any longer. Quickly she said, "I think that when we were young, Alida, women managed to control their feelings better. Nowadays they don't seem to mind what they do in public where a man is concerned."

"Maybe," said Alida with a cynical air; and something in the way she uttered the single word caused old Savina

to flush, thinking, "It's silly for Alida still to be jealous about Hector."

She kept thinking how lucky it was that Hector hadn't married her. It was so much better having Alida here in this warm comfortable house, so much better than if either of them was tied to some gouty, untidy old man always complaining of pains the way men did and trying to manage the lives of every woman within reach. And with Hector it would have been worse because he was *too* tidy, always fussing if a single chair was out of place. But then if he'd married her, perhaps he would have been different now, sitting there beside the fire in place of Alida. It was odd that the only man she had ever loved was like a woman, so fussy and *précieux,* but then she supposed that it was because she herself was so like a man, with her man's brain for business and such things. Nature had a way of evening things up. There were lots of marriages where the man was really a woman and the woman a man.

To-night Hector had been like a bitter disappointed old woman who couldn't bear the idea of growing old, and what had he to be disappointed about, with all the money in the world and freedom to do exactly as he pleased? But then maybe there were things she didn't know about which made him bitter . . . the way Alida was bitter sometimes, always reading about crimes of passion because she had never had any passion in her own life. Hector was never one of those powerful people who take circumstances in hand and wring triumph from defeat. He wasn't a man like Melbourn for example. No, he was perverse and impossible and his mere presence to-night upset her

and made her feel unclean. She kept seeing the soft, too pink face and the shallow, staring, bitter eyes, and it astonished her that she had ever loved that face so much that she had made a fool of herself. But she told herself it was not this face which she had loved but another which had long since disappeared beneath layers of fat, self-indulgence and selfishness. The face she had loved was a pale, oversensitive, almost womanish face. Thirty years ago he had been terrified of her and it was only now that she understood how much she must have shocked and frightened him that day in the apple orchard. It was afterward that his face had begun to change. He'd never forgiven her either for helping poor Patrick Dantry to woo Mary Champion here in this very parlor.

Now after thirty years of experience she saw that it was much better to be a poor, stupid, handsome animal creature like Jim Towner who never thought of himself than an oversensitive, precious, intelligent one like Hector. It was better for himself and every one else. But this time, she thought, Hector must be really ill instead of imagining illnesses that did not exist. He looked thinner and, in spite of the rouge, whiter than was usual and he had eaten nothing but dry biscuits and drunk only a glass of Vichy.

She heard Alida saying, "What's the matter?" and saw that Alida was watching her a little anxiously, with that shadow of fear which sometimes touched one of them at the thought that something might happen to the other and that one would be left alone in the big house.

She laughed. "I was thinking about Hector," she said,

and she was thankful Alida didn't know really how much she'd once been in love with Hector. And she wondered if Alida suspected what she knew now when she was old and knew the world—that Hector would never have loved any woman.

Alida pursed her lips. "The whole family is a bad lot."

"Mary Champion . . . Philip's mother . . . was all right."

"Well, she died young . . . before she had a chance . . . and Nancy made up for her."

Nancy! Why had she forgotten about Nancy? She too must be growing childish. She sat up suddenly and said, "I meant to tell you. Nancy's coming home."

"Nancy Champion?—Nancy Carstairs?"

"Yes. To-morrow."

For a time Alida said nothing and went on stitching at the tapestry. At last she said, "She's never been home since, has she?"

"No."

"I guess it's just as well . . . running off with her dead sister's husband less than a year after she was in her grave."

"It was more than two years after."

"Well, it began before Mary Champion was dead."

"Nobody knows that."

"It must have . . . You talk about Fanny's behavior and say women are worse nowadays."

Savina didn't answer her but she thought, "Poor Alida! She hates Nancy Champion because she envies her her life."

"She couldn't have come home while her husband was still alive."

"No."

"How does Hector take it?"

"He hates it, of course. It's uncomfortable."

"Well, she's respectable now anyway. What's her name?"

"She's Lady Elsmore."

"Lady Elsmore! She married an old rip."

Then she remembered too that Alida had had a feeling for Philip's father, who was Nancy Champion's lover. She saw that Alida had never forgiven Nancy for having run off with him, not even now, after twenty-five years.

Alida said, "She led a father to run off and desert his child."

"Patrick Dantry didn't desert his child. He'd have taken the baby with him if old Carstairs had divorced Nancy so they could have married. Poor Patrick died before he had a chance to arrange anything. You know that."

She was aware that they were perilously near to a quarrel, although they'd never had a quarrel and scarcely a sharp difference of opinion in all these years. It struck her as absurd that things dead for so long a time should still have a power so disturbing, and she wondered as she had done many times before, whether women had been so hard on Nancy not because she had done an immoral act but because she had had the kind of romance which all of them secretly desired.

"I've asked Nancy and her husband to tea to-morrow," she said. "Perhaps you'd rather stay in your room. I promised Hector I'd help look out for her."

Alida jabbed her needle furiously into the tapestry. "You know that's impossible. I can't be rude."

"You could say you were too ill. Every one knows you're not strong."

Again there was a furious jab at the tapestry. "You know I never do things like that. No, if you must have them I'll come down and do my best."

Savina felt a sudden impulse to laugh because she knew that nothing on earth could keep Alida from coming down to tea. Alone in her room she became delirious with curiosity.

"You seem in a great hurry about it," said Alida.

"I only wanted to make her feel comfortable. Hector won't be nice to her." But really all she wanted was to see Nancy again in this room where Patrick had made love to her, only of course, she couldn't say that to Alida.

"They say she led a very strange life for years."

"People always say that sort of thing."

"I suppose Hector doesn't mind so much now that she's the wife of a baronet. He's such an infernal snob."

"Yes, I think that makes it better. He's more of a snob even than a prig." She took another drink of punch and added, "It's extraordinary how like his father Philip is. He gets more like him every day."

"I suppose they'll meet . . . I mean young Philip and Nancy."

"Of course."

Alida was silent for a moment. "I should think that would make it hard for her. I suppose nobody's thought of that. Has she ever seen Philip?"

"No, not since they ran away. And he was only two years old then."

"Then she doesn't know how much he looks like his father."

Savina poured herself another half-glass of punch. One of the dogs, growing too hot, rolled over on his back, with his short legs in the air. She heard the little clock strike a silver midnight and heard the great booming clock in the tower answer back from out the rosy glow above the churchyard, and she thought that although she was sixty-seven and enormously fat it had never occurred to her that she was old, except when she saw some one like young Philip rushing off to court some young girl. Perhaps she had never had the proper vanity women are supposed to have and so didn't mind her body getting fat and her hair turning gray and colorless; but for a woman like Nancy, growing old must have been a different matter, especially if there was in her any of that morbidity which Hector had and which his mother had had before him. If you'd been as beautiful as Nancy or were as beautiful as Mrs. Wintringham, the passing of each year after a certain age must be an agony to you, looking into the mirror each day, seeing your face sag a little more and your eyes grow a little duller, knowing that the time was coming when you would no longer make a sensation on entering a room and people would no longer turn in the street to notice you. Nancy must be nearly sixty, and even though she'd made a brilliant marriage at middle age, it couldn't make up to a woman like her for the youth and beauty she'd lost.

She began to pity Nancy and to discover a satisfaction in never having been beautiful. There were compensations, she told herself, but not enough perhaps to over-

balance all the other things which Nancy's beauty had brought her. If Nancy wasn't a fool, she must have a great store of memories to live upon. There wasn't any doubt that she'd been wildly in love with Patrick Dantry, and after he was killed there were certainly other men, no matter what she could say to Alida in Nancy's defense. She must have loved them too, because she had always had plenty of money, even for a woman of her extravagant, frivolous tastes. Whatever else had happened to Nancy, now that she was old she couldn't have regrets for the things she hadn't done. Perhaps that was what was wrong with Hector—that he couldn't forget that he always kept himself in a glass case, denying every act, every emotion that might have disturbed him, until now when it was too late for life to make any difference to him. Perhaps he really hated Nancy's coming home because she had done all the things which he had never done and couldn't do now because it was too late.

She was aware that Alida was watching her again as if she thought her ill, and pulled herself back to reality. Savina got up clumsily and said, "It's long after midnight. You ought to be in bed and you oughtn't to be working any longer by that light."

Alida began rolling up her wools and thrust the needle into the tapestry frame while Savina went over to cover the cage of Katie, the parrot, with a Spanish shawl (this being a conceit of Alida who sought to prettify and feminize everything). Then she began to turn out the lamps one by one and Alida went out of the room, still a little irritated and cold from the words they had had over Nancy.

When she had gone Savina turned out the last lamp and stood in the dark, looking out of the window into the falling snow which now cast a silvery light into the sitting-room. It occurred to her that coming home after twenty-five years would be a great shock to Nancy—to find that nothing remained of the world which once had been everything to you and which you had given up in a single wild burst of unruly passion. It would be like being responsible for the death of some one you loved. It would be a shock to find nothing upon which to fasten your memories, and that even the house where you were born and the whole street in which you had played were gone forever. If you had lived so long in Europe where nothing changed, it would make you feel terribly old and lost.

Still thinking about Nancy she softly summoned the two dogs and, closing the door of the darkened room behind her, went up the stairs. At the top she found Alida waiting and she knew that Alida had been standing there in the cold hall for many minutes in order to show her that she was ashamed for the things she had said. Alida looked at her in the same anxious way, as she kissed her good-night, and Savina said, "There's nothing the matter with me. I've just had an attack of sentimentality. It doesn't happen very often and when it does it hits me hard."

But she was shocked a little at the sound of her own voice because there was something in it which sounded like Hector's hard, bitter voice. In sixty-seven years no one had ever imagined that a woman with so plain a face and so big a body might know the pain and the luxury of sentiment.

When she was at last in bed with the two Scotties asleep

in their baskets on the floor by her side, she discovered for the first time in all her healthy life that she could not sleep. She began to repeat to herself verse after verse of the Psalms she had learned as a little girl and had not said for years, and presently she began to count sheep and when nothing came of that she began to count up to eight over and over again rhythmically as Alida did on the nights when her arthritis would not allow her to sleep; but there was something alive in her brain which struggled against her will and kept tugging her back from the borders of sleep, drawing her back and back into the years of her childhood and youth. She thought suddenly that this must be at last the beginnings of old age and decay, for old people slept lightly and the memories of old people turned always toward their childhoods. They remembered more clearly things which had happened fifty years before than they did the things which had happened yesterday; so she tried to remember what had happened yesterday and found it difficult because she could not disentangle yesterday from the day before and the day before that. All her days were so alike; without much interest, without any change or passion, little more than a round of petty engagements made frantically, when you came to think of it, as if she were killing time until she died. And that she thought was a very good definition of life in New York as it was lived by almost every one she knew. That was what they were all doing—killing time until they died and could at last rest . . . Fanny with her distracting and hopeless love for Melbourn who cared only about writing checks for a million and a half and becoming the richest man in the

world, and that strange Mrs. Wintringham with her antique shop and her air of assurance and cleverness, and Hector too; killing time desperately with his endless stream of petty gossip and the intrigues he set on foot through malice, and his nasty thoughts and ideas. Poor Hector had been killing time ever since he was born with his precious tapestries and pictures and bibelots.

And slowly, as if she had fallen asleep and was dreaming, she became aware of a faint sweet scent that was fresh and springlike. It puzzled her until she understood that the scent did not exist in reality but was only the trick of a tired brain which wanted to go back to something which her will had been striving to stifle. She knew the scent. It was the smell of Aunt Juliana's apple orchard at Staatsburg, and suddenly she saw herself walking there not old and fat, but a girl in her twenties, big and plain and healthy. The earth was warm and green and the petals kept falling in little showers like the snow at each gust of wind. And she saw again a horse and rider rise suddenly from out of sight beyond the stone wall and she saw the horse strike its knees and suddenly turn over and over with the man under it. And then the horse struggled up and with the bridle rein dragging galloped away out of sight through the trees. The young man was Hector Champion and he lay with his face covered with blood, as still as the stone wall itself. And she saw herself tearing off a piece of her voluminous petticoat, dipping it in the rocky brook to wash away the blood, and she saw his head in her lap, the blond hair all rumpled and the too delicate face whiter than the petals of apple blossoms. At last when he opened

his eyes she was so overcome by a shameless desire that for a long time she was unable to speak and only sat trembling and shaking with her big strong body turning hot and then cold. He was like a helpless child, lying there with his blond head in her lap. She was strong and powerful and could love and protect him forever.

Lying there awake in the great bed, neither old nor young but ageless, she understood how even nice girls who knew better might be seduced, because it could have happened to her, Savina Jerrold, on that day when Hector's delicate curly blond head lay in her lap and now at the end of her life the greatest regret she knew was that it had not happened.

And when Hector managed to sit up and she found that there was nothing very serious the matter, she trampled on her pride and told him that she thought it would be a good idea if they married each other and that she understood how sensitive he was and how difficult it was for him to talk of such things and that she loved him so much that nothing made any difference, not even marriage. And even now, forty years afterward, she blushed when she remembered how he had put her off, saying that he had to think of his mother and that he must first go to Italy for a year to paint and that after that they might think of getting married. But she understood perfectly that he had rejected her once and for all. And she remembered suddenly how even in the midst of her love she felt a sudden swift contempt, born of her own proud spirit, for his weakness. It had always been like that. . . . Nothing had changed. She still knew at times the same swift contempt for his flabbiness, and she

still kept on thinking of him, being his friend, trying to help him.

And his painting? What had ever come of it? What had he brought back with him but some badly painted saints and bits of carved gilded wood and old brocade? In that day everybody had believed that anything which came out of Italy was Art. But long since Hector had discovered his error and all those things which he had brought back had found their way out of Hector's possession into the shops of art dealers who sold them to kept women to decorate flats on the west side. No, Hector had looked down on her always because she had preferred worn homely things which had associations and he was ashamed of her because she had never been able to hold her tongue at the proper time. She'd been shocking him all her life just as she'd shocked and frightened him by her display of passion that day under the apple trees of Aunt Juliana's orchard, and now, she thought, when he was old and miserable and maybe frightened, he would turn toward her. He was glad enough now of her bluntness and courage. She had a strange vague certainty that he was hungry for sympathy and that there was something he wanted to tell her and could not bring himself to do it.

The snow was still falling and a little drift of it had crept in upon the sill and on the polished floor just beneath. She heard one of the dogs get up, turn round and curl himself more deeply into his warm basket, and it made her think how warm and comfortable was the vast bed and that at last she was feeling sleepy. To-morrow she must look up Nancy at once at the Ritz because Nancy would

doubtless need cheering and Hector would doubtless be nasty to her. She was aware suddenly that there was a light somewhere near her and, opening her eyes, she saw that in the house on the opposite side of the churchyard some one had turned on the light in a room on the third floor. Through the snow the light made only a warm yellow blur. She wondered sleepily who lived in that flat and what was happening there and in all the other flats and houses crowded all about her. She heard the great clock in the tower striking two. The little drift of snow moved a little nearer the vast bed and suddenly she was asleep.

A little while later she wakened, to find herself sitting upright, certain that some one had screamed. She waited for a time, listening, and then went to Alida's door and opened it softly, but Alida was breathing quietly and safely in her sleep. She returned to the warm bed and lay for a time listening, but when the scream was not repeated she decided that she had only been dreaming, and was quickly asleep, thinking as she passed into slumber that Hector had seemed tired and pitiful.

CHAPTER IV

WHEN Philip Dantry said good-night to his Uncle Hector he wasn't thinking that the old man looked ill and lonely because his mind was far too occupied with Aunt Nancy's return and the complications of his own existence. In his direct and simple heart he was disturbed and unhappy as he always was when he found that life

failed to fit the simple, conventional pattern which he always counted upon to solve everything. When things went wrong he became helpless and troubled. Life, he told himself, ought not to be unpleasant. People ought always to be generous and big-spirited. And it was not the legend of Aunt Nancy which troubled him now but the reality, for despite all old Hector's plots and commands he *had* seen her long after his father was dead and he was a boy of eleven, and the memory of her had returned sharply to trouble him. It was a secret shared by himself and Aunt Nancy and Old Bidda Whalen who had been a maid in the Champion family when Aunt Nancy was a little girl and was Philip's nurse long afterward. And Old Bidda was dead now, having carried the secret of their meeting into the grave.

As he stepped from the elevator at Berkshire House he did not even see Pat Healy, the doorman, until he heard Pat saying, "A taxi, Mr. Dantry?" and then, shaking himself free from the memory of Aunt Nancy, he smiled and said, "No, thanks, Healy. I'll walk to-night." He halted for a moment and asked, "How's the new wife?"

"Fine, sir."

"No little Healy yet?"

Pat grinned. "Not yet, sir. But there might be at any moment."

"You like being married, don't you?"

"Sure. It keeps a fella from runnin' around and gives him something to think about. It helps that restless feeling to have a nice woman at home waiting for you."

Yes. Philip saw all at once what he meant, and the

warmth of Pat's grin filled him with a desire to confide in some one a little of what he had never been able to confide in the dry, cold, old man who stood in the place of a father to him.

"I'm thinking about getting married myself, Pat."

"Sure and it's a good thing. I can recommend a steady diet. It's better than chasin' around."

Philip took a ten-dollar bill from his pocket. "Here's something to spend on the new little Healy. Better give it to Mrs. Healy and let her choose. I guess you and I don't know much about what babies need."

Healy took off his cap. "Thank you, sir. I guess I'll be knowin' before long and you too if you're thinkin' of marryin'."

The glow that warmed Pat Healy extended to Philip. He felt suddenly delighted at the thought of marrying and begetting children. He, too, like Pat felt suddenly big and powerful. Like Pat, he experienced a sudden feeling that all creation was centered in himself. They stood for a moment grinning at each other, sharing all sorts of half-conceived and primitive and pleasant thoughts.

"Good-night, Pat."

"You'll be in late, sir?"

"Yes. You'll be gone home before I get in."

He went through the revolving door and Pat Healy said to the elevator man, "He's a fine fella, he is. They don't make 'em any better, and the girl that gets him is gettin' a fine husband."

"Sure," said the elevator man, "and I hope it won't be a woman like most of 'em that goes in and out of here."

The moment Philip was out of the door and felt the sting of the snow against his face, he quite forgot Pat Healy and lost himself in his own troubles. The warmth went suddenly out of him and anxiety took its place when he thought that he hadn't yet even asked Janie Fagan to marry him and was a long way from having a wife and little Dantrys.

It was not altogether because he was young that he was able to turn thus quickly from one interest to another but because it was a trait born in him and descended from his father, the glib and charming Patrick Dantry. In Patrick Dantry's day, cynical people had called this trait of his "being all things to all people," and in its essence it was a kind of selfishness, because Patrick Dantry, like his son Philip, could never thoroughly enjoy himself unless he felt every one about him shared in the enjoyment. He could turn on charm and interest and affection as one turned on water from a tap. But with his son this was an unconscious process which he did not, like his father, use brilliantly and without scruples. With Philip people at once sensed a simple friendliness and good will which bore no trace either of boredom or of mockery. In his engaging directness he wasted no time upon inquiring morbidly into the souls and motives of his acquaintances. It was, with his own good looks, the secret of his charm.

Now, pulling the coat collar high about his throat and his hat well over his eyes, he thrust his big muscular hands deep into his pockets and set out with a vigorous swinging stride westward almost in the footsteps of Jim Towner. And as he walked he found himself repeating over and over again the words, "Aunt Nancy. Aunt Nancy. Aunt Nancy,"

and seeing her again in a white dress, carrying a big hat covered with flowers, under the chestnut trees of a big walled garden where there was a fountain and a terrace with big stone pots filled with bright flowers.

To his romantic nature she had no reality as a thing so prosaic as an aunt. To him she was a beautiful woman whom he had seen once at an impressionable age and who ever since then had been half consciously the apotheosis of all that was pure and good and beautiful in woman. She was like a figure which had visited him in a dream never to return again. Even the story of the scandal with his father (which had come to him bit by bit in hints and whispers over a period of years) had no reality. It was like something read and half remembered. Even when he thought of his own mother whom he had never seen he always thought of her in the image of her sister, Aunt Nancy. It was as if he had been in love with her since childhood, and now she was coming back. To-morrow, in flesh and blood, dressed in clothes like any other woman, she was returning to them all.

As he walked his thoughts wandered from Aunt Nancy to Janie Fagan and back again rather aimlessly and presently it struck him as odd how much they looked like each other and that it was strange that he should love a girl who was so like his aunt, with the same fair skin and dark eyes and hair, the same slim exciting throat.

But the thought of Janie filled him with a sudden return of anguish and fear. She might refuse him and if she refused him he did not know what he would do.

As he walked the thought kept returning to him that

he was glad he'd kept himself clean and decent for the girl he meant to marry—a pure nice girl like Janie. Now that he was so much in love he didn't even mind all the struggle, sometimes so painful, to go his own way and avoid taking up with some woman. He forgot even that there had been times when holding himself in check had meant a kind of physical pain, and he saw suddenly the difference between a thing which was a blend of desire and a craving for a physical relief and the thing which was love; because he was in love with Janie and being in love with her filled you with all sorts of noble thoughts and high aspirations. When you were in love it wasn't your own satisfaction you thought of, it was the other person. You wanted to do things to make her happy. Love wasn't sordid like the other things. He told himself that if he'd gone, like most men of his age, with this woman or that just for a night, he would have hated himself now, instead of being filled with delight at the thought of beginning this new life as Janie would begin it. There was something wonderful about thinking that they would come to each other both chaste and clean. A girl like Janie deserved such a marriage. And he grinned a little sheepishly when he thought that most people believed him a deep fellow who had had mistresses by the dozen because he simply kept silent when they told of their adventures. It wasn't any of his affair. They could all do as they pleased so long as they didn't try to make him behave the same. Thank God, there wasn't anything to confess to Janie. He wasn't like his father. He'd bring to Janie a body as pure as her own.

And then he began thinking again about Pat Healy and

how wonderful it must be to have babies of your own and he thought what fine children he and Janie would have, and he grew suddenly excited and the blood rushed into his face and he walked more and more quickly until he thought of what he was doing and knew that if he kept on at this pace he'd arrive at the theater long before the play was finished and would have to stand about cooling his heels.

The thought of the theater threw him into a panic of fear lest Janie had made a great success to-night and so would be lost to him forever. He told himself that he did not want her to fail because he loved her and did not want her pride to be hurt, but he prayed inwardly that her success would not be so great that she would forget him and give herself over to the glamor of that other life which he hated. He wanted her to have a little success, just enough to give her satisfaction without filling her head with ideas of new triumphs. He told himself that he had absolutely nothing to offer her in exchange for all the glamor and adoration and excitement she already knew. And then to encourage himself he thought again of how she had asked him not to come to the theater on this opening night. "Not the first night," she had said. "I'll be nervous enough without having to think of you out in front." And when he asked, "Does it make that much difference?" she had looked at him and said in a low voice, "It makes a great difference. I don't want to fail before you." He saw her again as she looked at that moment and his heart began to beat more rapidly. If she said such a thing, there must be some hope even for a dull awkward fellow like himself. And then she had promised to have supper with him after-

ward. That, he thought, would be a good time to ask her to marry him.

If she refused him, he thought tragically, there would be nothing left for him to do but to clear out for some part of the world where he could forget her if that were possible. He couldn't stay in the same city with her not being able to see her day after day. He wouldn't hold himself in any longer. He'd just go to the devil with women and drink.

In his love for her he recalled a thousand small things about her—the way the dark curls clustered on her small head, the line of her white throat and the way she had of thrusting her head forward a little when she looked up at you, and the way she had of looking out from under the long dark lashes, the way, once or twice, she had laid her hand confidingly and chastely in his, the sound of her voice and the way she laughed, the shape and the curves of her slim body. He would be gentle with her because she was so small and frail and helpless and he would love her as no man had ever loved a woman before. It was odd how there was something pure and uncontaminated about her which had kept her safe through all the dangers of the world in which she lived. And as he thought of her he grew more and more excited and prayed that she would marry him quickly because he could not go on like this thinking of her day and night, tormented and unhappy and never able to touch her.

But the more he thought of her the more unworthy he seemed. He saw that he was nothing but a stupid, faithful, dogged fellow who could never be amusing and keep up the pace of the give-and-take set by the people he met in

the theater. Her world was so glamorous and brilliant and his own so stupid and respectable and filled with people like Uncle Hector and Savina and the Towners. She would never marry him. Why should she? He had nothing to offer but money and she had all the money she wanted and success as well.

It struck him again how like Aunt Nancy she was and his mind careened off into the past and he wasn't any longer a grown man walking west through the Forties, and hoping to marry and found a family of his own but a little boy of eleven walking through a narrow street in a foreign city with old Bidda Whalen at his side. The street was narrow and shut in on both sides by walls over which hung great bouquets of lilacs and the low branches of chestnut trees bearing spikes of cream-white bloom touched with flaming specks of crimson and mauve and yellow. Old Bidda wasn't old but middle aged and she wore a long gray coat and a bright-green blouse and a big hat covered with every kind of flower because she didn't believe in nonsense and wouldn't "rig herself up like one of them limey nurses." She always traveled suspiciously, hating every place that wasn't New York; and now in a foreign country, she walked with an air of agitated suspicion as if dragons and giants might spring out from every corner to seize her darling Philip from her side. She kept looking back over her shoulder as if she thought some one was following her through the lonely street (Philip knew now that it was her conscience troubling her for having broken her promise to Uncle Hector never to see Aunt Nancy). And as she walked she kept looking up at the numbers

beside the little gates that led through the walls into the gardens beyond. And presently they came to a plain low house with a garden and beside the gate leading into the garden Old Bidda found the number she was seeking. She grew excited and breathed hard and took great trouble to set her hat at just the proper angle and to brush imaginary dust from her coat before she knocked. When at last she did knock, the gate opened at once as if by magic or as if some one had been expecting them with impatience, and inside there was standing a big red-faced woman with a white lace cap on her black hair who began speaking French of which Bidda understood not a word, but the woman made them understand by signs that they were to follow her.

It was a hot day and the garden, which appeared enormous and stretched down to the river where there were tugboats whistling, smelled of acacias and chestnut blooms. They went down some steps through a small grove of white lilacs and came into an open space with a great many trees surrounding it. There was a fountain in the middle and at one end a pavilion. Near the pavilion there was a boy about his own age playing with a fat old Scotty who barked and wheezed frantically when the boy threw sticks for him. And the back of the house was strangely different from the front. Instead of being plain and low, it had a beautiful façade with three rows of windows and a terrace bordered by great stone urns filled with bright geraniums and ageratum. And then suddenly they saw coming toward them out of the shadows under the chestnut trees a small woman dressed all in white, like a princess.

Bidda began suddenly to whimper and cry and then she and the lady ran toward each other and Bidda took the lady in her arms as if she hadn't been a princess at all and they both fell to crying and talking at the same time, without listening to each other at all. After a moment the lady, still weeping, looked down at him and said, "So this is Philip," and then hugged him and kissed him with a terrifying violence.

She had a pale white skin and beautiful blue-black hair which she wore pulled back and done in a knot at the back of her small head. He thought she had the most beautiful dark eyes he had ever seen. Her dress was of white muslin and she carried a hat of leghorn straw covered with flowers and with a bow of blue ribbon on it. And she had the most beautiful white arms, bare to the elbows, and a soft white throat and she smelled of some delicate but intoxicating perfume. The boy, startled and fascinated by her, stood staring at her awkwardly until Bidda, still snuffling and blowing her red nose, said, "This is your Aunt Nancy, give her a big hug and a kiss."

It puzzled him at first for he did not know he had an Aunt Nancy, but he kissed the lady shyly, as he was told to do and she knelt down on the gravel path and took his grubby hands and looked at him, and after a moment she said to Bidda, "He *is* like him," and then she began to cry again, softly, without a sound. The big tears simply rolled quietly down her pretty face. He had never seen any one cry like that and because he was shy and confused it made him want to cry himself.

They all sat on wicker chairs under the trees and the

lady asked him how he was and if he liked Paris, and he answered politely, as Bidda had taught him to do, although he was still bedazzled and not yet quite sure what he was doing. Bidda kept snuffling and blowing her nose and presently she said to the lady, "It wasn't right what you done, Miss Nancy, but I must say, admitting my sins before all the saints, that my heart was with you. There never was such a nice man as Mr. Dantry." And she began to laugh wickedly, the way she did at home when her cousin the policeman called on her.

At the sound of the name Dantry, which was his name, too, the little boy was more puzzled than ever, because the Mr. Dantry, who was his father, had been dead for years. He must have been, he thought, a friend of Aunt Nancy and that was why she was crying over him. In the midst of his thoughts the lady said, "Why don't you go over and play with Jean, Madame Shane's little boy? Take your hoop and run along." He ran quickly across the thick short grass, past the fountain, because that was what he had been wanting to do all along.

But when he got to the strange little boy he stopped running and became shy but the stranger said, "Hello," in a friendly way and asked him if he wanted to watch the goldfish and carp in the pond under the fountain. He saw that the lady had turned her chair and was sitting now so that she could watch them while they played, although she still kept talking in the same excited way to Bidda.

They watched the goldfish and then fell again to throwing sticks for the dog to chase and the red-haired little boy who spoke English with an accent, took him to the coach

house where there was a rabbit hutch filled with young rabbits which they fed with grass torn up from the garden. And then in the midst of his games he heard Bidda calling him in her loud strong voice, shouting as if she were in the country at Staatsburg instead of in the middle of Paris, and when he ran to find her she and the lady were walking slowly up the path to the steps which led up to the gate.

He thought they must have a great deal to say to each other because they were still talking in the same excited fashion. At the gate the lady knelt again and hugged him till his breath was gone and kissed him in a way no one, not even Bidda, had ever kissed him before. As he and Bidda went through the gate he looked back and saw that she had slipped down into the middle of the path in her spotless white dress and was weeping with her face buried in her hands.

He never saw her again and he remembered her always as she had been running toward them out of the shadow of the chestnut trees, her dark eyes lighted by some mysterious excitement; and as he grew older the memory, instead of fading, seemed to grow clearer and clearer while she herself seemed to acquire a greater and greater glamor. In spite of all that Bidda told him afterward, she had never been to him merely a comfortable aunt, but a romantic woman, unlike any other he had ever seen. Whenever he had asked Bidda to take him again to see Aunt Nancy and the red-headed boy, Bidda always said that she wasn't there any more, that she'd gone away, and that he was never to speak of her in front of Uncle Hector.

Long afterward, when he had become a grown man, he

found the street again but it was much changed. Where there had been garden walls and chestnut trees there were high white apartment houses, but the big house which turned so simple and unpretentious a back upon the street was still there with its walls and the gate leading into the garden where he had played with the boy, but he had not the courage to enter, and when he asked who lived in the house they told him it was an American woman called Madame de Cyon who was once Madame Shane. She had lived there for nearly twenty years, so the romantic lady who was his Aunt Nancy must have been staying with her.

When he thought of her now she still remained an unreal figure in an old-fashioned white muslin frock with tears in her great black eyes. She couldn't be a person of real flesh and blood who would return into their midst, yet she must be that because there were lots of people who thought of her as scandalous and impure. They were people who said nasty things about her and he remembered suddenly how when he had been younger he had overheard these things. Even now he winced at the memory of them and wanted to cry out as he had wanted to do then, "They aren't true. I know because I've seen her. I know what she is." But he couldn't do that because he would betray Old Bidda and because people would only laugh at him and ask cynically, "How can you tell a woman is pure by looking at her?" And they would say other unbearable things like "Probably she had a lover even then. Your father had been dead for years."

He kept telling himself, as he had done always, over

and over again that such things couldn't be true, and yet deep down in his heart there lurked always a terrible doubt that they might be true. He told himself that such a woman couldn't be cheap and fast any more than a woman like Janie could be cheap and fast. You could tell good women from bad ones. The world was quite wrong about her. To-morrow, when he saw her again, he'd try somehow to let her know how he had felt about her all these years. But the doubt wouldn't go away. It still stirred with life despite all the arguments he rehearsed in order to kill it.

And all at once he began to hate this Uncle Hector for the way he had treated his sister and he knew suddenly that he'd always hated the old man ever since he was old enough to begin understanding him. If Uncle Hector had stood by his sister instead of shutting her out everything would have been different. He thought of the old man sitting at home alone and the picture raised no feeling of affection but only a twinge of conscience and a faint feeling of pity. It annoyed him that Uncle Hector was old and ill and lonely. The memory of the old man saying, "I'm simply tired. Don't fuss over me," when his whole body and his eyes were crying out, "Stay with me. I'm alone and ill," filled him with irritation instead of pity. He knew what old Hector wanted and he was angry at him because his own conscience troubled him. He told himself that old Hector was selfish and piggish and did malicious things, because it made the old man's illness and loneliness seem a just punishment instead of a tragedy. Except for the great-hearted Savina he hadn't probably

a single friend in the world. And then, softening a little, he thought, "I ought to go to him and say, 'I know you're ill. Tell me about it and I'll do what I can. Talk to me.' " But he knew that such a thing was impossible because in all the years they had lived together there had never been any intimacy between them but only a sort of polite constraint.

He told himself as he walked that his duty lay behind him and that he ought to be sitting at home in the library before the fire, talking and talking about Melbourn and Mrs. Wintringham, Jim and Fanny Towner, morbidly and maliciously prying into their lives the way the old man loved to do. He knew that his uncle had not gone to bed at all but was sitting up now in his dressing-gown waiting and hoping that Philip had changed his mind and would come in early. But he knew too that he could not have stayed. He could not even now turn back, not even if he had known for certain that when he returned he would find the old man dead. He *had* to see Janie. He no longer had any control over himself and was being driven by some force through the snowy streets, almost in the footsteps of Jim Towner, toward the theater where she would be waiting for him.

Just before him he saw suddenly the blurred lights above his head melt into the words, ROSA'S PLACE, and he thought suddenly of Rosa Dugan and of himself and Janie listening to her sing. Beyond the sign another and larger blur of lights melted into the words, BRYANT THEATRE. He saw that after all he had arrived at the

theater too soon and that certainly he would not find her alone waiting for him. There were people still standing beneath the marque of the theater signaling desperately for taxicabs or trying to discover where in the blizzard their motors had been lost. He looked into the window of the jeweler's shop and saw by the clock that it was long after midnight. If the play had lasted as long as this it must have been a great success. Doubtless, he told himself, with a sinking heart, they had been calling her again and again before the curtain.

He could not wait standing outside the theater, so he turned in at the covered alleyway that led back to the light above the sign, "Stage door." The corridor was damp, cold and empty save for a few battered theatrical trunks and some pieces of rotting scenery. As he neared the door he saw two men and a woman come out. The woman was wrapped in furs and he recognized her as a well-known actress. With her was a critic who always praised extravagantly whatever she did and another man he had met once with Janie and did not remember by name. Passing them, he felt shy as he always felt in the presence of such people, and pulled his hat further over his eyes, but he listened to catch what they were saying, hoping that it might give him some clue to what had happened inside the theater; but already they had forgotten what had happened and were saying malicious things about some person whose name he did not hear. They passed him and he entered the door.

Inside he found himself lost for a moment in the dark-

ness and surrounded by a crush of people—women in furs and brocades, men in evening dress moving about in the shadows. In one corner there was a brilliant unshaded light which threw into cruel relief a tired strained face here and there among the crowd. Among them he recognized an actress called Mary Milletts who was a friend of Janie and had a small part. She was already finished and dressed for the street. She was receiving congratulations from the friends who surrounded her. He nodded to her almost without knowing what he was doing.

And then in a corner, talking to the fireman he discovered a young actor he knew. The man left the fireman and came over to him. He was grinning and pleased and Philip knew what he was going to say. He forced himself to ask, "Well, how did it go?"

"It couldn't have been better. Janie was the greatest success of all."

Philip tried to say, "Splendid!" but he only felt his face stiffen and turned away without speaking at all.

Pushing his way through the crowd, he went toward her dressing-room. The doorway and all the rooms were filled with people, most of them strangers to him and belonging to the side of Janie's life which always roused his jealousy. He told himself that they were pressing forward to greet her now that she had had a triumph and he hated them all for being there because he wanted no one to possess her but himself, even in the smallest degree. By pushing rudely and angrily he forced himself to the threshold and suddenly he saw her, turned a little with her back to the masses of flowers and the countless tele-

grams pinned by her maid to the borders of the mirror. She had not had time to remove her make-up and she still wore a dressing-gown of scarlet which set off magnificently the black ringlets that covered her small head. She looked tired but she was smiling at all these curious faces pressed about her. It struck him again that she was like Aunt Nancy. She had the same white clear skin, the same beautiful hair and dark burning eyes.

Then she saw him and called out, "Hello, Philip. Wait for me. As soon as I can get dressed I'll be with you." And he blushed as if all the others saw in his face the love that had taken possession of his mind and his body. She gave him a kind of special smile which tormented him because he could not know whether it was meant for him or was simply a smile of satisfaction in her triumph. He left them, proud that all the others should know it was himself whom this radiant creature was awaiting. It was utterly fantastic and impossible that she should find any interest in such a dull fellow.

Two or three people looked at him, thinking perhaps that this was another of those young men who ran after actresses, never knowing the torrent of passion and despair in the big, handsome figure, never suspecting that in this body there was something which, due to another woman who was frail, had remained pure and incorruptible in the midst of corruption.

He went into a far corner of the stage and, finding a kind of cavern behind a large artificial rock, he hid himself to wait until the others had all gone.

CHAPTER V

RUBY WINTRINGHAM lived in a small house built on the roof of an apartment house sixteen stories above Park Avenue. All around it there was a terrace and its windows looked out over the towers of half the city. She liked it because it stood as a sort of symbol of her success. It was a house coveted by many and so its value for her was increased many times. She liked it too because it gave her a sense of being completely alone and independent in the midst of the city which, as she told old Hector, she loved. When she had entered it and closed the door behind her, she felt alone and impregnable and completely herself.

When she left Savina she thought, "Miss Jerrold is a kindly old thing who is rather nosey. She's a nice woman," and then dismissed her from her thoughts. She meant to go to the tea to-morrow because having Savina Jerrold for a friend was like having an anchor to windward. It was, she told herself, all very well to say that people weren't snobbish any longer and didn't mind who came to dinner, but when a woman was alone in the world and ambitious, there were always other women ready to do anything to damage her. Being a friend of a woman like Savina Jerrold gave her not only a sense of security but security itself. So again by instinct and without really thinking very much about it she marked down

Savina as one of the minor conquests necessary to the ambition which rarely gave her any peace.

She had not much time to think of Savina because she had to think of the note which Melbourn had passed her and of all that it might signify.

The note left her a little dazed so that she could not decide what it was she meant to do. All the way home from Hector's dinner party while she sat beside Savina she had been thinking about it with the part of her mind which seemed always to be at work. Such a note, written as a command, could mean only one thing and that was that he would ask her to marry him. A man who meant to ask you to become his mistress did not order you abruptly to sit up until all hours of the night waiting until he found it convenient to arrive.

And when she thought what such a marriage meant she could not believe that either the note or Melbourn himself were quite real. It was too easy. Her luck, she told herself, was too good and could only be the prelude to some great misfortune.

She saw it at first simply as a matter of dollars. In that light it seemed very simple. She would be the wife of one of the richest men in the world. She could have everything that her luxurious soul and body desired. She began to imagine the houses she would own and the yachts and the complete freedom to do as she pleased. She did not think at first how much it would cost. Because she had known poverty she had a morbid terror of being poor and now that she had money of her own she could not

believe that her success would last. It was something glittering which might vanish over night. But because she had been poor and had made her own fortune she had extravagant tastes and did not cling to money in the way of people like Savina and Hector who had inherited money and lived in terror of losing it. That was a different sort of terror. She told herself that if she married Melbourn she could not even by the wildest extravagance spend all the money which would be hers.

It was only when she had reached the door of the little house on the roof that she ceased to think of the money and began to consider Melbourn himself, and she found Melbourn as a fact more difficult to accept than his money. She had known him for only a few months and now when she thought of him as a possible husband she discovered that she did not know him at all. Certainly, she admitted, she did not love him. She was not, in honesty, even fond of him. Yet she did not dislike him, even for the coarse brutality which had displayed itself once or twice. It was a coarseness very different from the coarseness of Charlie Wintringham. The feeling he aroused in her, she decided, was one of fascination. He was so ruthless and certain of himself and of getting everything he desired. There was nothing in the least romantic about him and nothing that was soft or tender or intimate. Yet when you thought of him in another way, he was everything that was romantic and he had a capacity for great tenderness. And she began to weigh the disadvantages of being married to Melbourn against the advantages of all that his money would bring her.

To do this she thought inevitably of Charlie Wintringham. She saw him again, gross and fat, too flashily dressed and wanting her to dress like a chorus girl. She was aware once more of how much she had suffered from his insensibility and how much she had been shamed by his vulgarity. She tried for the millionth time to excuse herself for having married him and to do it she repeated all the reasons she had used to convince herself at the time—that she could not go on forever being a librarian in San Francisco, wearing away all her youth and her beauty, that she had done it for the sake of her son and because she had loved her son's father so much that when he died she knew that she could never love any one else. But all the time she knew that none of these things was true. She had done it out of a cold and relentless ambition that gave her no peace until it was satisfied. She had wanted then and still wanted not merely wealth and power but the greatest wealth and power it was possible to have. That was why she had taken money from Charlie Wintringham ever since she had divorced him. Now, quite suddenly, she saw that what she desired was within her grasp. She could have it for the taking but she was afraid.

Living with Melbourn, she told herself, wouldn't of course be like living with Charlie Wintringham and she wouldn't feel soiled by his embraces, because Melbourn was an attractive man and plenty of women like Fanny Towner ran after him. It was only that she was afraid of him and when she tried to discover why she was afraid of him she could find no reason more definite than

that her instinct made her afraid. She would gain one kind of independence but she would lose another. She wouldn't have any longer the knowledge that the money she had was her own made by her own work, and she wouldn't have the independence of living alone with her son in the tiny house high above the city which she loved. She fancied that whoever married Melbourn would be his slave. But in the same breath she told herself that she was not like Fanny Towner, a fool with whom he could do as he pleased.

Suddenly she was ashamed of her own hardness and felt a curious overpowering desire to slough off like a snake his skin all that had happened to her in the past twelve years. She wanted again to be what she had been, a pretty, rather simple girl without sophistication, content and even marvelously happy in the love of Fred Saunders. She began to pity herself and to tell herself that if he hadn't died she would now be the simple wife of a sea captain surrounded by a half dozen children instead of this hard woman who had had to do the best she could for herself in a hostile world. It was the world, it was this city all about her that had made her a creature of whom her father would have been ashamed and one whom Fred Saunders, if he could return to life, would not know.

But honesty with herself and dishonesty with others was her strength and as she turned the key in the lock of the house which she loved, she knew that all her self-pity was simply feminine and hysterical and that in all honesty she had never done anything which she had not chosen to

do. She knew too that it was too late now to change, because the past twelve years had fastened their weight upon her and the weight of all the plottings, the deceptions and the worldliness of which she had been guilty. If she turned back now she would end only in failure and confusion. She had to go on. She had to marry Melbourn whom she did not love for what she could get out of it, whether it ended well or badly.

In the little sitting-room she stopped suddenly and looked at herself in the gilt mirror that hung above the lacquered chest which was her only souvenir of a childhood that seemed to her to have come to an end a thousand years ago. She saw that the face of Ruby Saunders had almost vanished beneath the face of Ruby Wintringham. It was not only that the fresh look of her first youth had gone from it; the change was more subtle than that. The eyes seemed deeper set and more brilliant, the skin whiter, the mouth less full and harder, and about the eyes and the mouth itself there were the beginnings of little lines. She was handsome now where before she had only been fresh and pretty. She was thirty-four, with ten or fifteen good years before her. After that she wouldn't be able to marry men like Melbourn because she was beautiful. After that she'd have only her cleverness. And what she needed now and forever was money, money, money.

She thought suddenly that there were in her soft and beautiful body two women. One might have been called Ruby Saunders, who was generous and sentimental and nice, and the other Ruby Wintringham, who was hard

and brilliant and calculating; but Ruby Saunders had almost disappeared, crushed by Ruby Wintringham and all that Ruby Wintringham had forced herself to do; she was crushed by the disgusting embraces of Charlie Wintringham, and by the money she had taken from him as his divorced wife, and all the pretense and plottings which had hardened her and brought her success.

She turned from the mirror and walked thoughtfully down the little hall. Half way she opened the door of a room a little way so that she might look into it without admitting too much light. She saw her son in bed asleep, with his snub-nosed face and curly blond head thrust into the pillow and she saw again how exactly he was like his father. For a long time she stood in the door watching until the boy turned on his side and she closed it quickly lest she waken him. She did not want him to waken and look at her now for it seemed to her that if he wakened he would see a stranger whom he did not know, and who was not his mother but a cheap and calculating adventuress.

As she turned away she felt a sudden sharp pain compounded of sorrow and passion and desire. In that moment she would have given everything in the world, even her son, to have had back again the father of her son and to feel his body against hers and his voice telling her that she was for him the beginning and the end of everything.

But it was no good. Fred Saunders was dead. He had been dead for fourteen years. She could no more summon him to return than she could summon back the simple love-stricken girl who had been Ruby Saunders.

2

In the darkness of her own room she let her fur coat slip to the floor and flung herself down on the bed in the gown of black chiffon which was like a cloud about her body. For a long time she lay with her head buried in her arms, frightened because for the first time in all her life she felt tired. She asked herself if she was beginning to be old. If being old felt like this she would go on feeling more and more tired, having to go on fighting no matter how tired she was. All the dash and the delight of her success seemed to fade into nothing and all at once she hated this city and all the world and all the people whom she had used and who had used her for what she and they were able to gain. She realized why it was that people who failed came to hate this terrible city. It was a place made only for those who succeeded.

She knew suddenly that she was too hard even to weep out of self-pity. She had chosen this life and do what she might she could not change now. It was fastened upon her until she died. And as she lay there she wanted passionately to be Ruby Saunders again, whose life was so simple and filled with pleasant, easy things. As she thought of that earlier life it seemed to her more and more beautiful and glamorous, far more beautiful and more glamorous than it had ever been in reality. And it seemed to her that the only two noble men she had ever known were her father and Fred Saunders, and fate had taken both of them from her. If she could have kept them she would have been a nice girl now who was not tired and ashamed of herself.

It hurt her when she thought she had never loved her father enough while he was alive. It was only now, long after he was dead and since she had learned more of the great world than most people ever learn, that she understood his greatness. Lying there in the dark she saw him again, tall and bent, with long arms and great powerful hands, looking older than his age, with enormous, black, burning eyes which were forever seeking something which no mortal would ever find . . . a missionary who was unlike any other missionary there had ever been, who never spoke of God alone but always of God and Nature together, as if they were one. She saw him coming down from the Manchurian mountains laden with the strange and beautiful plants which he tried valiantly to make grow in the dusty sun-burnt soil of the mission compound. She saw him again, a Methodist parson, talking passionately with Father Hippolyte, a Jesuit priest, of the strange yellow azaleas and scarlet lilies that grew in the wild barren mountains north toward the Gobi desert . . . a Methodist parson who had had his daughter taught French by a Jesuit priest because he wanted her to be educated properly. She saw how different he was from the other two missionaries who lived in the same brick compound, burned bare by the heat of summer and frozen in winter by the winds that came down bearing the dust and the sand of the Gobi. Mr. and Mrs. Biggs were *regular* missionaries, childless and each blaming the other for it and quoting scripture to each other in their long drawn-out quarrels, writing home secretly to the Central Board about her unorthodox father's friendship with Father Hippolyte.

She saw now that her father had only been able to endure them because for him they didn't really exist at all. In his absorption in his daughter and in the wonders of the opalescent mountains he simply was unaware of such people as the Biggses.

She saw him again as a good father trying awkwardly to take the place of a mother who had died when she was born, in the year the bubonic plague killed half the natives in Shan-si.

She wondered what had become of Father Hippolyte and the old *amah* and of the Biggses, struggling to convert a stubborn community which was designed by God and Nature for a religion so different from the cheap narrow Christianity which the Biggses preached. It all returned to her with an amazing vividness, all the violence of the climate, the sun-burnt courtyard of the compound with the ducks waddling about outside the wire that protected her father's garden, the distant mountains that were always mauve and blue and green in the shimmering heat of summer and the long trains of mangy dromedaries driven by wrinkled copper-faced Mongols bearing tea to the north and bits of jade and bales of felt into the south.

It was like something she had dreamed, which had no relation to all that had happened to her since. It was something in any case which had happened to Ruby Saunders who was dead but never to Ruby Wintringham who lay on the bed in the dark sixteen stories above the streets of New York. If ever she told all that story, no one would believe it. They would only think her a romantic and designing liar.

It struck her suddenly that women had never played any rôle in her life. It was always men who counted. She saw that she really did not like women and felt uneasy with them. For when she married she had only exchanged her father, who had been everything to her, for Fred Saunders who was everything to her. And after that there was Charlie Wintringham and now Melbourn.

Fred Saunders, too, returned to her as she lay in the darkness. He came back as she had seen him for the first time when he came up the path toward her Uncle Heber's bungalow on the hill above Hong-Kong. She had gone to visit Uncle Heber because her father said that the time had come when she must live for herself and leave Shan-si and discover a little what the world was like; because Shan-si was not the world at all and when she had once discovered the world she would never come back to Shan-si again. She had been sitting on the veranda with Aunt Minnie while Uncle Heber, who was a trading merchant, took his after-lunch nap. Aunt Minnie had her hair in curl papers and was rocking and fanning herself with a palm leaf fan and when she saw the strange young man turn into the path she rose and fled into the house, leaving Ruby to receive him.

He had come up the path looking slim and tall and powerful in his blue sea captain's dress and when he saw her he raised his cap, exposing a blond curly head burned bright yellow by the sun. He had, she thought, the most frank and charming face she had ever seen. He was tanned and had small bright blue eyes set deep under a high forehead and surrounded by little lines that had come from

squinting against the brilliance of the tropical sun. And almost at once her heart had begun to beat more rapidly and she had thought without thinking, "This is the nicest man I have ever met. I could love him forever and bear his children and be happy with him." And then in the next second, blushing, she thought that this was what her father had tried to describe to her. It was a kind of chemical reaction. It was the way people fell in love.

And now long afterward when she had come to know the world as a place full of hypocrisies and disillusionments and deceits she still knew that she had fallen in love with Fred at first sight. There was such a thing because it had happened to her. She loved him as he stood talking to her, holding his cap in his sun-burnt hands. She loved him as much as she could ever love him, which was a million times more than she had ever loved any man. And afterward when she was his wife he told her that he had felt the same way about her.

It all happened quickly. In six weeks they were married, because he wanted to take her to San Francisco with him as his wife and he wanted them to have a proper honeymoon ashore before they sailed. Her father came down from Shan-si for the wedding, dressed in a strange ill-fitting suit sent as a contribution to the missionaries in China by some pious Methodist in Iowa. He looked tired and old but happy too that she had fallen in love and was going to be married and begin to live for herself. When she thought she ought not to leave him and spoke to him of it, he had said, "No, it's your turn now. It's what God and Nature intended. Whatever happens to

you, good or bad, is better than not living at all. I haven't any right to you any longer. I know Fred will make you a good husband because it's written in his face. People can't escape from their faces. I'm glad you've found such a nice boy as Fred."

So they went to Peking for their honeymoon, and her happiness had been so great that she did not think of it as happiness. It was only now, years afterward, that she understood it had been the kind of happiness, blended of passion and desire, tenderness and beauty, that came to one woman in a million. It was as if flame had enveloped them both, forging them into a single body and a single soul. She saw now that her father had played his part in that happiness for because of him and all that he taught her she had gone to her lover in a fashion as natural as the mating of the birds in the mountains her father had so loved. She knew now that with most women such things were different, all marred and distorted by shame and revolt and self-consciousness.

If all the rest of her life had been misery and wretchedness she would not have given up those few weeks to have saved herself, for she saw now that she had known something which few other women ever knew.

And then within two months he was dead and in the evening they had buried him in the very midst of the Pacific Ocean and she was left alone to enter a strange civilized world of which she knew nothing, to bear his child, and to hear the news that her father too was dead of cholera in the sun-burnt compound at Shan-si and that there was nothing in China to which she could return.

While she lay there she thought suddenly, "But all that's finished. It's been dead for fourteen years. It can never happen to me again. Perhaps it couldn't have gone on forever. Perhaps we would have grown tired of each other or at least used to each other so that the best part of it would have been dead. Perhaps I'd have grown restless after a time and wanted all the things that I've had since and that I still want. Perhaps it was better like that."

For she saw that even then, before she knew how precious an experience she had had, she was aware that in a way she was different from other women who did not know such a love. And as she grew older the sense of its beauty had increased so that when she was confronted by a woman like Fanny Towner, she was not disconcerted or angry, but only sorry for Fanny because she understood without thinking of it that she had known what Fanny Towner had never known and would never know now because it was too late and because such things could happen to you only when you were young.

It was odd to think that if Fred had not died she would have been another woman, quite different—the simple wife of a sea captain, with a family of children waiting in a small house in San Francisco for him to return from some distant voyage. She tried to make herself believe this, but in her heart she could not believe it because she knew that there would have been a time when even her passion for Fred could no longer have held in check that strange ambition to conquer all the world. When she thought of it she saw that it was an ambition which had begun in

her childhood in the compound of Shan-si when she had dreamed, not like other children of jungles and strange remote countries filled with adventures, but of the great cities she had never seen outside the pictures in her geography books—cities like Paris and London and New York filled with palaces and great hotels and millionaires and princes. It all went back a long way and it had still a long way to go before it was finished.

Suddenly she was overcome by a sense of shame, for she knew that if Fred Saunders could return to life and that if he were to step into this room the next moment, there would be a great barrier between them made up of all the things that had happened to her since he died. He would seem to her handsome and physically magnificent but strange too because she would be seeing him from a distance across an abyss. She would see him as a simple honest man, a sailor, almost, she thought, as if he were an automobile mechanic, and so they could never again quite touch or know each other. And there would be differences of thought. They wouldn't see things in the same way because her vision would be all complicated by what she had learned from a complicated world. He couldn't go with her to the places she went to, to dinners like old Hector Champion's to which she went although they bored her, because it was part of the career which had taken possession of her. There would be times when she would be ashamed of his naïveté and his lack of grace and sophistication. And he . . . He wouldn't know her at all. He'd think her a shallow insincere woman, frivolous and selfish and mean. And he would be right,

of course, because he'd be so much finer than herself.

But in the end she came round again in the endless circle of her thought. He was dead and with him had died something of herself which she could never again bring to life.

Sighing, she rose from the bed and, turning on the light, looked at herself once more in the mirror. Her hair was all in disorder now instead of lying close to her head in smooth shining waves, and it gave her a look of recklessness so that she thought for a moment that perhaps Ruby Saunders was not quite dead. But it was only an illusion. The face was not the face of Ruby Saunders but the face of Ruby Wintringham who had steeled herself to endure the embraces of Charlie Wintringham, and lied and cheated and been trivial and ambitious in cold blood. It was the face of a clever woman who knew the world.

She turned away from the mirror and, pulling the cloud of black chiffon over her head, she lighted a cigarette and put on a tea-gown of crimson velvet. She smoothed her hair once more into its expensive waves and, turning off the light, went into the little sitting-room where she stood for a long time looking out of the window across the city, lost completely in the fantastic beauty of its towers rising black and gray out of the glow of light turned all silvery by the blowing snow. And she saw that it was more fantastic and beautiful than anything she had ever dreamed of as a child in the sun-baked compound of Shan-si.

Presently she seated herself before the fire and tried to

read a French novel that Melbourn had sent but she could not read it. It was the old story of husband, wife and lover and did not interest her very profoundly and the author in trying to be literary had succeeded only in being boring. Her mind kept wandering off from its pages into the most glamorous avenues of thought, of the houses she would have in New York and Palm Beach and Paris and perhaps London, the yacht which would be the biggest yacht that had ever been built, and the dinners she would give to great bankers and ambassadors and decayed royalty and the clothes and the jewels that would be the most beautiful that had ever been seen. And presently Ruby Saunders died completely and there was only Ruby Wintringham, rich, brilliant, ambitious, cunning and beautiful, who sat waiting for Melbourn to arrive.

CHAPTER VI

AS Melbourn and Fanny Towner drove off into the blizzard, Pat Healy looked after them for a moment thoughtfully and then, turning abruptly, went back through the revolving doors into the shining hall of Berkshire House. To the elevator man he said, "D'you see that guy?"

"Yes."

"They say he don't know how rich he is from one day to the next."

"It's him that signed the check for a hundred million?"

"A hundred and fifty million. Yeah. That's the guy."

"Funny. He's so young lookin'."

"Yeah. He can't be much older'n you."

"Well, he's got a lot more o' this world's goods."

The elevator man was thoughtful for a time. Then he said, "He don't look like an easy guy to get on with. I guess he treats most people as if they wasn't quite bright."

"Well, mebbe if you could sign a check for a hundred and fifty million, you'd be like that too. Mebbe he ain't so wrong at that."

"Well, mebbe I would."

"That's a swell car he's got."

"Yeah, it must have cost a lot of money."

"About like you or me buyin' an egg beater at Woolworth's."

"Well, as I say to the old woman 'money ain't everything.'"

"Yeah, I heard that somewhere before."

Pat Healy looked at his watch which, as he pulled it out, became entangled in all the gold lace that adorned his doorman's mulberry costume. He began to pace up and down, round and round the big marble and silver corridor, thinking about Esther and how slow the time was passing and when the baby might be born and about going to hear Rosie sing and about old Granma Kochitz and her daughter Mrs. Rothstein who lived in the other side of the tiny two-family house in Primrose Place out in Corona and assuring himself that Esther would be all right because she could call on them and old Granma Kochitz, who knew about being a midwife, would know what to do.

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And in the car Fanny Towner sat thinking dramatically and with a kind of perverse satisfaction that she was like a woman shut in a windowless prison beating her bare hands against the walls in a hopeless effort to escape; because she was afraid of Melbourn and because whatever she did or said was certain to annoy him.

Beside her Melbourn, angry at her behavior, began to think of her with a sudden cold detachment altogether new in his affair with her. He saw for the first time why it was that when people who knew Fanny spoke of her they always said quite naturally and without thinking "poor Fanny." He began to think of her as he might have thought of a mine or a mill which he had purchased and discovered was not all that he had believed it to be. He saw that she had plenty of money. She had two handsome and attractive children. She had a good-looking and amiable husband who would have satisfied most women and who in his day had been the great match in her world. She was still young as women went nowadays although she usually looked tired from the stress of emotions which went completely unrestrained. She had everything, yet never in her whole existence had she been happy or even contented and she looked upon herself (he knew this only too well) as the most wretched and unlucky of women. It was true, he told himself, that her husband was a drunkard and that probably he ran about after other women for want of something better to do, but it was true too that he was a stupid fellow and that she did noth-

ing to help him find some direction for his existence; and it was true that there must have been a time when she could have made of him the most perfect and devoted of husbands. He saw all at once the very essence of Fanny's existence—that she believed everything should come to her without effort and that when she did not get what she wanted she saw herself as the victim of cruel misfortune. He saw that for her the entire world revolved about her own small and rather shallow soul and that she wore herself out struggling always to force people and circumstances to follow the pattern of her own satisfaction. People thought of her as "poor Fanny" because they knew without thinking about it that she was a fool and possessed of a selfishness so colossal and so fundamental that it did not even appear to her to be selfishness. He saw why it was that when her greediness for excitement and satisfaction showed itself in her rather sharp, narrow, pretty face, strangers took a dislike to her which she resented and could never understand. She wanted to be brilliant and pretty and adored by every one and her very greediness destroyed her mind, her looks and even her friendships. He saw suddenly that she had already destroyed any love which he had once had for her, and in the next breath he told himself quite honestly that he had never loved her but that he had taken her because she was pretty and so easy to take that it seemed a pity not to amuse himself. He was aware that, sitting there beside him, she was nervous and irritable and longing to indulge herself in a fit of wild hysterics which she did not dare attempt because she was afraid of him, and in his sense of power over her and in

his sudden contempt for her he felt a desire to grin because it seemed to him that he was avenging poor Jim Towner and all the others she had made unhappy and wretched time after time.

She kept making the most banal remarks about the blizzard or the new chauffeur or other subjects which were certain not to lead to an intimate conversation, for she was aware that if she opened the thing which was occupying both their minds it would be certain to lead to a quarrel which might end in the only way which she feared. She was afraid of Melbourn because she loved him as she had never loved any one in all her life. She was even frightened of the way in which she loved him because she had discovered suddenly at thirty-eight that she was possessed of a body and that a body could do terrible things to your pride and your self-respect. It was no physical fear because she knew that he would never touch her; she was terrified of his complete self-possession and that sulky coldness which seemed to put her always in the wrong; and Fanny had always gotten what she wanted by putting other people, either by hysteria or violence, in the wrong. He had a way, too, of saying bitter crushing things in a cold voice which left her feeling empty, shattered and ill.

Between banalities she kept thinking, "If only there were something soft and human in him which would let me talk to him, but if I begin to talk he will only be annoyed and perhaps stop the motor and get out and walk home. What have I done to deserve suffering like this? He doesn't care in the least what becomes of me. I daren't

threaten to leave him because I am afraid that he would say coldly, 'All right, go,' and I should have to go."

She told herself that she hated him, that he was an ill-bred swine and that she had best get free from him forever, because there was no use in going on in such unhappiness, always abasing herself before him, never daring to do what she wanted to do, never saying what she wanted to say; and all the while she knew that it was impossible and she would give up all the rest of her life for a single rendezvous with him. She who had been brought up as a nice girl had discovered at thirty-eight that there was something wild and abandoned in her nature. She did not say to herself that her body had gotten possession of her mind and her spirit. She believed that she was simply warm and passionate by nature, a quality which all her literary friends assured her was a virtue, and that she had never been aroused until she met Melbourn; and because this theory only served to increase her dislike for a husband who had come without the graces of a lover to take her when he felt moved, it encouraged also her belief that she was an unfortunate woman who had made an unhappy and even a tragic marriage.

She thought, "I behaved badly to-night toward Mrs. Wintringham but she is a —— who is trying to steal him from me and if I did behave badly it was only because I love him so much. It was only on his account. I can't help it if fate made me a passionate creature, all feeling."

She knew that the rudeness toward Mrs. Wintringham was the reason for Melbourn's sudden sulky coldness, but she could not tell whether it was because he really was

attracted by Mrs. Wintringham or merely because he detested such behavior, and the doubt kept tormenting her. She knew his dislike for indiscretion of any sort and she remembered that he had once told her that if their love affair became public property it would have to come to an end because he could not afford to go about with open scandal attached to his name. And she remembered that once in a moment of annoyance he had cried out scornfully, "Do you think that love is all of life? It is only a little part of it and ought to be kept in its place." She knew that he said this not because he was a cold impotent man but because he had in some inexplicable fashion managed to arrange his life into compartments so that his impulses and emotions rarely conflicted with each other. Therefore, she thought, he could well afford to be discreet. It was easy enough for a person like that. It was different with some one who was all feeling. Yet in the next instant she knew that he was more passionate than herself and more sensual.

One moment she thought, "I'll get out of this car now. I'll jump out of it and go home alone through the snow. Perhaps I should catch pneumonia and die and then he'd be sorry." And in the next, she knew that she could not do it for fear that he would not even take the trouble to follow her and if she died of pneumonia he would only think it was because she was a fool to have done anything so stupid. And when she stole a glance at him sidewise so that he might not know that she was watching him, she knew that she could not imagine life without him and that she could not live with the knowledge that she might

never again see the dark irregular face except distantly and as the face of a stranger. It must belong to her always. She was bound to that face and that body by a horrible but an exciting passion, and so she dared not do the least thing which would displease him.

And because she lived thus from day to day with desire and hatred for him constantly battling in her body and her soul, she felt herself growing older and older and more and more tired, for there was no serenity in her nature and things piled up endlessly one on top of another to torment and rend her. There were times when alone in her own room she would think of him and fly into a wild jealousy of all the women he had known before her; yet she never dared to speak of them for fear of driving him into a temper that might end in his leaving her. She kept saying to herself over and over again, "Why must I suffer thus? What have I done to deserve it? Why should a nice woman like myself be cursed with this terrible desire?" Yet she would not for the sake of her life have been freed from that same desire.

She looked at him again and saw suddenly a thing which she had never noticed before—that there was no tenderness in his face, and in the same moment she understood that it was tenderness which had always been lacking in their relationship. She had been dazzled by his looks and by his wealth and the knowledge that other women desired him, and perhaps too by his success which made him so different from Jim Towner, and for a moment she felt a sudden warmth for her husband because she remembered as if it had been a shadow the awkward ten-

derness and courtesy with which he had treated her for many years after they were married. She pitied herself and even forgot for a moment the awful boredom with which Jim never failed to envelop her whole spirit and how there were times when he was so tiresome that hysterically she could not hear what he was saying.

Against the glass of the motor and the flying snow beyond Melbourn's profile appeared clear-cut, the forehead high and box-like, the nose finely shaped and proud, the lips full and sensual, the chin dropping a little away from the lips to the jaw that was set in a hard line. She thought, "It can't go on. It grows worse and worse every day. It's got to end and what is to become of me then? I can't go back to Jim and I can't live on and on like an old maid." And she began to think of awful stories she had heard of women like Savina's second cousin Mildred who people said made love, at forty-seven, to common men like policemen and taxi drivers, and without understanding what she was doing she began to see the face of Melbourn's chauffeur, thinking how handsome he was and that he must have a beautiful body, and then realizing sharply what she had done and that it was odd that she should be able to see a common man like a chauffeur so clearly in her imagination, she felt suddenly sick and terrified.

"Do we have to go to this party?" asked Melbourn wearily.

She found her voice and answered, "I promised that I'd stop in for a moment. We shan't stay long."

He did not answer her but fell again into a sulky silence.

Not once had she said to herself the one thing she could not bear to face and the one thing which she knew was true. She kept pretending and evading it and putting it off from her. Not once did she say to herself, "I love him, and he's fed up with me."

3

As they drove on southward through the blizzard a thousand things floated through the mind of Melbourn. In his immense activity and countless interests he had long ago learned the trick of relaxing, mind and body, and allowing thoughts, impressions, impulses and doubts to drift through his mind, disheveled and unrelated. It was a restful habit and one which he had discovered led to the solution of many things. Sometimes things fitted together suddenly, without effort, revealing the proper course to take. At the moment he wondered whether he should buy the Picasso he had seen the day before at Wildenstein's and whether old Lord Elsmore would be difficult to deal with in this business about the Gobi mines and how odd it was that Lady Elsmore should turn out to be Hector Champion's sister and why it was that Fanny thought so many second-rate people creatures of importance and whether it was not perhaps because she was herself shallow and second rate. He wondered what Jim Towner had been like before he had taken to drink and whether he knew what Fanny was doing and whether he cared, and what a queer, unhealthy bore old Hector was and what a nice, pleasant commonplace fellow the old man had for a nephew, but always his thoughts kept wandering back

to Fanny and how he was to end this affair in which he found himself entangled.

He was aware that she had made a fool of herself publicly and that it was not the first time and that if it happened again they would end by being the subject on the tongues of half New York. Try as he would, even admitting that she had simply given herself to him on a platter, he could not understand how he had ever become so deeply entangled with her, because although she was pretty, she was a dull woman, without wit or spirit, who had been so spoiled all her life that at times like to-night she was insufferable. A woman could afford to make such scenes only if they added to her fascination and that happened not once in a million times. He had never found himself entangled with such a woman before—save once. He saw suddenly that Fanny was exactly like Verna Hostetter, the first mistress he had ever had, and Verna was the daughter of a German groceryman. When he thought of Verna Hostetter he flushed with shame and anger, even now nearly thirty years afterward.

With a mind celebrated in the world of finance for its clearness and detachment, he began with the same clearness and detachment to see himself as another person in his relation to Fanny and the more he thought of it the more it seemed to him that he had involved himself in an affair in which the game was not worth the candle. She was not attractive enough to outweigh the trouble and embarrassment which she made, and she was certain, as time went on, to become more and more troublesome. She had in her mind, he knew, the idea that she might divorce

Jim Towner and marry him. He told himself that he had not the slightest intention of doing such a thing, but the thought of the complications she might make to attain such an end filled him with distaste. She would stop at nothing. She would be shameless and dreadful.

He knew that she would not retire quietly, thus putting him in the wrong, but that possibly she would lie down and scream and kick, wholly unaware that she was doing the worst thing possible for her own interest by making it easy for him to detest her and break with her without the slightest regret. And he saw at once that she had always behaved thus ever since he had known her, spoiling her own happiness. He saw then why it was that most people spoke of her as "poor" Fanny. That was what she was . . . poor, distracted Fanny without any rudder to her life and with no interest save that silly superficial one in celebrities by which she hoped to create about herself an importance which she did not possess.

He was aware that she was looking at him but he did not turn his head lest his eyes should meet hers. It was not that he was afraid of her or that she might read in his eyes what he was thinking, but because he knew that she was consumed with curiosity to pry into his mind and from the habit which comes to people who have made their own careers, he could no longer share with any one even the least revealing of his thoughts.

While he kept thinking of her he kept seeing all the while the figure of Ruby Wintringham and more than ever she seemed to him the complete opposite of Fanny and so all that was restful and charming and desirable. He

saw her in a dozen phases, as she appeared in her little shop struggling (he imagined) to make ends meet but always appearing well dressed and spirited as if there were nothing at all to trouble her, as he had seen her during week-ends on Long Island, playing bridge admirably, perhaps because she dared not play at all unless she played well enough to win, and playing with the boldness and clarity of mind that characterized the play of an excellent man player; as she had been to-night quietly ignoring Fanny's cheap and hysterical rudeness. And always she appeared to have about her an air of mystery of which poor Fanny had not a trace. It struck him that there was always between her and himself a strange feeling of understanding. The same things amused them. He knew this for he had caught her glance more than once and found in it that same twinkle which had suddenly captured old Savina and in an instant made of her a staunch partizan. Perhaps, he thought, it was because she, like himself, always felt a little outside the circle of people like Fanny and old Hector and young Philip. And he began to wonder again what her past had been and whether she, like himself, was a complete but quite legitimate adventurer.

A second time he knew that Fanny was watching him with a sidelong stare and again a wave of anger swept over him, carrying with it all thought of Ruby Wintringham.

It was not the immorality of the relationship which troubled him because he had long ago put consideration for this particular form of immorality out of his mind. But there had never before been an affair in which he seemed to be carried along without any great passion or

interest, nor one which filled him with a curious presentiment of an evil ending. He thought that perhaps this was because he was forty-seven and not in his first youth. There were occasions of late when for the first time in his vigorous life he felt tired and bored by all those tricks of manipulating money which had always fascinated him, and the idea had come to him that he ought to marry and think of growing old. He even thought for the first time of having children and a household admirably run and dinners of distinguished people, not the second-rate people who satisfied Fanny but really distinguished people, and for such a plan he needed a wife who understood without being told the great position he meant to attain not only in America but in Europe as well, and not only in finance but in politics too, for he understood that the day had come when financiers instead of kings and ambassadors ruled the world and made war and peace. He saw it all, even his wife and his children, as a part of this vast career which had occupied him since the day he had begun to think of what he meant to do with his life, and because he had already achieved far more than he had dreamed and achieved it many years before he had hoped, it did not occur to him that his life would not go on with the same success until at length he died. Death was the one thing he feared with a morbid terror. No matter how long he lived he would die having done only a little part of all that he desired to do. Death and old age he abhorred and he fancied that they would be easier to meet if he were not alone.

He heard Fanny saying, "Here we are . . . We won't stay but a minute."

The motor had stopped before a house with a brownstone stoop piled high with snow. There was something in the sound of her voice that made him pity her because he knew that she was doing her best to please him and the pity made him ashamed too of what he had coldly determined to do. They got out and hurried across the windswept pavement. Now that he saw poor Fanny as pitiable the last traces of any love that remained for her vanished. He was astonished suddenly that it was possible to feel for a woman whom you had known so intimately a detachment so complete and cold. He had finished with her and she was a stranger to him.

4

The party was being held in two rooms on the third floor of a brownstone house and twenty-two people filled the rooms to overflowing. When the door opened Melbourn and Fanny discovered them sitting on chairs, on sofas and some on the floor. As they passed the doorway of a bedroom they saw the figure of a man lying dressed upon the bed. A tall very thin girl wearing a great deal of brass jewelry which made a clanking sound came out of the door and grinned at them.

"He's passed out," she said, nodding with her head brightly in the direction of the man on the bed. "He'll be all right in an hour or two."

Fanny laughed, he thought, because that was the thing to do. He saw at once that "passing out" seemed to be

considered a joke and even an accomplishment treated with distinction.

The walls were covered with brown paper that was faded and above the sofa there was a long dark streak where many well-greased heads had rested. On a table in the corner stood a tray filled with glasses and ice and bottles of whiskey and gin. Other glasses stood about here and there on the floor. In a chair at the far end of the room a girl in a blouse made of some metallic material sat on the knees of a thin, pale, young man whose face wore an expression of patience rather than of ardor. In the chair next to them a man slept soundly, sitting upright, his eyes closed in the drollest fashion behind his rimless glasses.

A vigorous young woman dressed in red suddenly charged at them with a cry, saying, "Hello! I thought you were never coming."

Fanny introduced her to Melbourn as Miss Hodge, the hostess, and told her that they had come in just for a moment and would not stay long as she was very tired and Melbourn had work to do on the following day. And then the vigorous young lady who Fanny said was a poetess, took them around the room, introducing them to Mr. Schermerhorn and Mr. Hazlitt and Miss Welspach and Mrs. Oliver (she was the young lady sitting on the pale young man's lap and who did not rise but merely shook hands and permitted the pale young man to do likewise when he was introduced as Mr. Hannan). In a loud aside Fanny said, "You know . . . who writes for the *Liberalist*." He saw that Fanny had grown suddenly flushed and excited and he felt bored and disgusted.

And presently Fanny was borne off by an ecstatic young man into a far corner and Melbourn found himself deposited in another corner with two women and a man who took no notice of him but went on talking about a woman called Myra, of whom one of the women was telling a scabrous story. He listened for a time, disturbed not by the impropriety of the story, but by the peculiar malice with which it was related and by the satisfied mirth with which it was received, and by the peculiar unhealthy cattiness of the young man. And then he fell back again into that state of mental drifting, aware dimly that opposite him Fanny, surrounded by three young men, was enjoying herself immensely. She had become arch and was exhibiting what seemed to him a cheap coquetry that made a bid for the attentions of three boys years younger than herself. He saw suddenly that she was without dignity and so quite without balance. He knew that she fancied she was having a brilliant conversation. She shook her blonde head and showed her white teeth in a flashing smile, and quite suddenly she seemed to him hopelessly silly and foolish, and his distaste for her became so strong that he could not imagine ever seeing her again, and at the same moment she became a symbol of all the uneasiness and the dull mistrust of himself and of all the world that had attacked him more and more often of late. For the first time in all his existence he felt that he was as aimless as Fanny and that his life was moving slowly toward a vast emptiness in which there would be only the machinery of figures and the poor satisfaction of knowing that he was one of the four richest men in the world. It occurred

to him that there was something lacking from his existence and that he who had been for so long above happiness and unhappiness and concerned only with success or failure, was tired and bored and unhappy. His companions had left Myra and turned their tongues upon some one called Herbert, and his distaste for them became suddenly so overwhelming that he rose abruptly and crossed over to Fanny.

At his approach the chatter died away as if a foreigner or a spy had broken in upon the circle and Fanny, looking up at him, smiled and said, "I know. We shall go at once."

The vigorous young woman rushed up to them and, shaking their hands violently, followed them down the narrow corridor to open the door. As they passed the bathroom they heard the sounds of some one being sick.

5

The air of nervous excitement still clung to Fanny as they descended the dark stairs and on her side the sense of strain between them was broken. She laughed and said, "A good party, wasn't it?"

"Yes."

Turning she looked at him. "But you don't really think so. You think it was awful."

"Perhaps."

"It's too bad you always have to be priggish about things like that." This time there was in her voice the faintest note of irritation that augured the beginning of a scene. He had no desire even for an argument and he felt ex-

tremely bored and annoyed with her, so he answered, "Perhaps I am priggish. I can't change now."

"You're always expecting people to be as noble as yourself."

"I don't pretend to be noble. I don't pretend morally to be any better than the worst of them. It isn't that."

He pushed open the door into the blowing storm and the chauffeur, wrapped to the ears in furs, got down and opened the door of the motor.

"To Mrs. Towner's," said Melbourn.

Inside once more she began again the argument, irritated that he had not been impressed by what she had meant to impress upon him.

"You've got to remember," she said, "that every one can't be as perfect and controlled . . . and cold-blooded as you."

At this he laughed. "*You* know that isn't true."

"There's something more temperamental in all those people."

"Perhaps."

"Some one of them may one day do something that will be remembered long after you're dead."

"Perhaps." He didn't like that remark for it struck suddenly at the worrying sense of his own uselessness.

"You needn't have insulted them, at any rate."

"How did I insult them, Fanny? You're being ridiculous."

"You sat there like a lump of putty. You . . . you *submitted* to the party."

He laughed again. "It seemed to me the only way to take it. I did it for your sake."

"Well, I shan't ask you to again."

"It's only that I don't like messiness," he said quietly.

He began to experience a slow, cold and rising anger because the quarrel she was attempting to make seemed so cheap and shoddy and over people who were cheap and shoddy, and because since two hours ago he had begun to feel himself completely detached from her, as if the affair were already ended. The detachment permitted him to see what a fool she was making of herself if she was trying, as he knew she was, desperately to keep him. It was a new kind of anger that he felt toward her, no longer an emotion in which he was entangled, but the kind of impatience he had for people who were stupid and muddled things.

He said sharply, "I've no intention of arguing with you. I don't even want to go on discussing it. I don't think people have to get drunk and be sick in public nor to make love in the middle of a room filled with people. It's second rate and sordid. I don't give a damn about morals but I care a lot about taste."

"You've suddenly become very grand." She said it spitefully and, turning away, fell to looking out of the window.

He knew that she was striking at his origin and the fact that the world looked upon him as an adventurer; and the smallness of the attack filled him with a sudden wonder that he had ever thought her attractive at all. He

thought of a dozen crushing answers but he made none of them. He simply flushed and closed his mouth with a firmness that made little knobs appear at the angles of his jaws.

The motor stopped suddenly before Fanny's graystone stoop and in silence he got down to go with her up the steps. Neither of them said anything until they were inside the door and then, taking off his hat, he said, "I can't go to Long Island on Sunday. With Elsmore coming it's impossible."

He saw that she had turned pale and that the spots of rouge on her cheeks stood out hard and garish, and that there were tears in her eyes, but for the first time the sight of her tears made no impression on him. His only emotion was an intense desire to escape as quickly as possible.

"You knew he was coming all along. It's odd that you've just discovered that you can't leave him."

"Fanny, I'm not going to stand and quarrel in a doorway."

She began again to feel that terrible sensation of being powerless before him. She wanted to cry out and beat her head against the wall. "Come inside where we *can* talk."

"No, I'm too tired to-night."

She thought, "This is the end. What is going to become of me? I can only kill myself." But at the same time she knew that she never could.

"I can't get away for the week-end," he was saying. "I'm sorry but there's nothing to be done." The mere idea of ever holding her in his arms again had become suddenly

repulsive to him. He had broken with other women and had had other quarrels but they had never been like this, so cheap and shallow and without a regret.

"Good-night," he said.

Then she had the tactlessness to say, "Aren't you going to kiss me?" And he replied politely, "Don't ask me to, Fanny. I don't feel like it. It would only be silly. It wouldn't mean anything." It shocked him that she could be so insensitive and shameless.

"So it's finished, is it?" she asked in a dead voice.

"I suppose so. It's no use going on."

For a moment she stood holding to the handle of the door for support and then, looking up at him, she said, laughing, "Very well. It's finished. You've treated me like the devil since the beginning, as if I was a worm under your feet and you've finished that way. I ought to have known in the beginning that you were common and brutal. I know where you're going. I saw you pass that note to Mrs. Wintringham, and I am not going to forget it. I'll spoil everything for her and you too. I'll make it impossible for her to go anywhere. But she's your kind. You're a pair. You'll understand each other."

"Yes," he said quietly. "That's true, I think." But she was too hysterical to see what it was he meant.

Beginning to sob she turned suddenly and slammed the door in his face. Through the glass he saw her running up the stairs like a mad woman and for a second he thought, "She may kill herself or do something awful." But the fear quickly passed because he knew she would never kill herself because she was too shallow. The worst

she would do was to lie about him and Ruby Wintringham, never understanding that her venom betrayed her to all the world.

6

Sighing, he went down the steps and told the chauffeur to drive to Mrs. Wintringham's. When he began to think calmly of what had happened it seemed to him that the break had been much easier than he had expected. It had been violent but very brief, and on his part there was not the faintest regret. On the contrary he felt that he had shaken off something which for a long time had given him a sense of being soiled and cheapened and of living constantly in danger of some shameful public scene. And deep in his soul there was a curious perverse sense of satisfaction that he, David Melbourn, born in poverty, with a drunken and criminal father, had just cast off Fanny Towner, whose origins were everything that his were not. It was a feeling that made him ashamed and so he pressed it back again into the darkness of his soul.

He began to think of Ruby Wintringham and he thought of what Fanny had said, "But she's your kind. You're a pair. You'll understand each other." And he saw that there was a truth in the remark much more profound than Fanny had imagined and a truth which gave him pleasure. Ruby wasn't spoiled. No one knew exactly what her history was but in her there was that sense of solidity, almost of steel, which gave you confidence. She was, he thought, an adventurer like himself. They would understand each other.

He had decided long ago that when he chose to marry

it would never be a woman of Fanny's class and background, so that she might have over him the advantage of position and so be able to say as Fanny had said, "You've suddenly become very grand." Once long ago such a speech would have hurt but now he was too certain of his power and his success. It was so spectacular and so enormous that it outweighed all else.

The motor slowed up suddenly and then came to a halt. In front of it the snow had drifted across one side of the street, blocking the way, and on the other side a taxi stood at the curb. While he sat there he saw two figures emerge from the taxicab. One was a tall woman in a fur coat and the other a man rather bulky in figure who was clearly quite drunk. He watched them, fascinated by the woman's skill in steering the reeling man across the pavement and into the doorway, and then as they disappeared into the shadow it struck him that there was something about the figure of the man which reminded him of Jim Towner. The taxicab rolled away from the curb and his motor moved on.

He thought again suddenly of Fanny, wondering what she was doing, and then he told himself that he knew. She had probably thrown herself on the floor and was screaming and biting the carpet. He thought, "She is an *awful* woman." And instead of feeling contempt for Jim Towner he felt sympathy for him and pity that he had been weak enough to allow Fanny to ruin his whole life.

For a moment there returned to him again that vague sense of something wrong in his own existence. He could not discover what it was save that life itself had become

more and more barren of late and that things which once had excited him now bored him and the success which had once been the whole end of his existence now seemed too easy. He had a strange sense of having accomplished everything he had set out to achieve and of being suddenly at loose ends, marking time in space until he died.

The motor stopped before the door of a great apartment house and he glanced at his watch. It was after two o'clock and for the first time it struck him that he had done a thoughtless and domineering thing in asking Ruby to wait for him. He told the chauffeur to go to bed and, walking in, he asked the doorman to telephone to Mrs. Wintringham's apartment. "I think she's expecting me. If she doesn't answer at once, don't disturb her."

But he felt suddenly that he could not go away without seeing her, believing, without any reason, that she alone could destroy that strange uneasiness and give him peace. He was tired and for the first time he wanted some one to be gentle with him, understanding what he was and all that he had done and why he had done it. He felt that it was impossible any longer to go on alone.

CHAPTER VII

SHE was born of an Irish father who was a bartender and a Polish mother who was the daughter of an iron worker, and she was christened Rosie Healy. Until she took to leading her own life she lived in a three-room flat in Avenue A with her father, her mother who died

when she was ten, and three brothers. Now at thirty-one, it was Rosie who kept her father from the charity house on Welfare Island and paid crooked lawyers to keep her brother Tim out of Sing-Sing. She had helped to buy the candy business which her brother Jerry allowed to die slowly and she paid for the wedding of her brother Pat who married a poor girl and helped him to buy the little house in Corona. Of all of them Pat was the only one she loved. And when she saw any of them, except Pat, they threatened her with the priests and told her that she was bound for hell for the way she lived and the way she got the money which they spent. At thirty-one she had been arrested four times, once when she was seventeen for being mixed up with a gunman called Sicily Tony, twice for breaking the prohibition law and once for hitting another chorus girl over the head with a chair.

Her appearance was more Polish than Irish, for she had skin the color of ivory and big, slant, dark eyes that were a heritage from some Tartar chief who had raided Poland and left his seed there. And she had a body that was too voluptuous to be fashionable but which excited men more than the thin bodies of the women with whom they danced at Rosa's Place. She had shiny black hair that fell just below her ears and a too large mouth which she painted a bright vermilion; and sometimes more because of despair than because she liked drinking she drank too much, for she was all that was volatile in spirit and during long periods she would be gay with a wild gaiety which ended always in moods of the blackest depression. Once in the days when she was a show girl she attempted to shoot her-

self and nearly died of the wound but since then she simply drank steadily and determinedly until the mood passed.

When she was seventeen she fell in love with an Italian called Tony Bruzzi, who was handsome, swaggering, black haired, a bully and a coward who only worked at tasks which brought him constantly into the shadows of prison. In his own world they called him Sicily Tony. She couldn't have brought him "home" even if he had been willing to come because her father hated wops, and so she had a wild love affair with consummations in doorways and in the shadows beneath the bridge and sometimes when they were lucky and no policeman discovered them, on hot summer nights in the park. And sometimes they went to the room in Fourth Street which Tony shared with another gunman. But it all came to nothing for Tony got caught at last and went to Sing-Sing and they arrested her too because she had been seen with him too often and when they found that she was going to have a baby they sent her to a Catholic house of refuge. Her father made Tony marry her before they sent him up the river and for a time she wrote to him, but when she got no answering letter she gave up writing and did not hear from him again. The baby died and when Rosie was well enough to leave the home she went back to the tenement on Avenue A. It was the first time her father had been able to lay hands on her since she had got into trouble and he nearly killed her with a beating that was designed to vindicate the Healy family honor. So she ran away and got a job in the chorus and after that things went better. She always had money

and when Pat came to tell her that their father had had a stroke it was Rosie who put up the money to send him to a decent hospital.

Rosie's success was simply accidental for there was nothing in her character that led her, by sacrificing everything to succeed, from one triumph to another until the battle was won. It was only by accident that she sang the most vulgar and sentimental songs so that they acquired a reality and no longer seemed vulgar and sentimental but so moving that men and women when they had drunk a little too much began to think how rotten they were and sometimes even wept. It was an accident that there was something tragic and splendid in her appearance which arrested the attention, and an accident that her voice which was no voice at all and had never been trained, possessed a primitive and strangely exciting quality. It was an accident that Rosie was Rosie. For the rest she sang because she enjoyed it and because in moments of depression when she felt vaguely weighted by the unhappiness of all the world, she experienced the primitive need of a release which she found neither in love nor in bad whiskey; and she enjoyed singing the more when there was a crowd listening to her. In her whole life she had never thought why this was. It only occurred to her that in singing she was able to say something which was impossible to say in the crude speech which was the only speech she knew. She sang to the simple accompaniment of a piano, lazily, simply, seated on the edge of a table.

Sometimes she would not appear at Rosa's Place for two or three days at a time and then people would come in

and look about and not seeing her would go away again and tables would stand empty and the manager would tear his hair and say he was being ruined by her, but he knew there was nothing to be done because Rosie was in one of her moods and was completely drunk, and when she was like that neither threats nor pleading made any impression upon her. Besides she knew that she would lose neither her contract nor her commissions because without her the night club would have been only a bedizened room filled night after night with empty tables.

Even the beginning of her career was an accident. It happened one night in a cheap restaurant in the Forties where she had gone for beer and sandwiches and a pickle after the show, and feeling a little drunk she raised her voice and began to sing. At first the cheap actors and the racketeers and the chorus boys laughed and then they listened and a little Italian with a big stomach named Franconi came and offered her a job singing in a *table d'hôte* restaurant. After two weeks he put her in the revue at a cheap night club he ran and presently he changed its name from the Perroquet to Rosa's Place and put in new plush curtains and some cheap gilt and suddenly found himself with a new clientele. The carriage trade had come to his doors and it was Rosie Healy, now called Rosa Dugan, who brought it.

2

When Jim Towner stepped through the plush curtains he stood for a moment quite still, clinging to the curtains to steady himself. He watched Rosie, not quite certain where

he was, for he was muddled and all the room was dark save for the circle of white light in which she sat. He had a wild impression that she existed thus in a great void, in space itself surrounded by nothing. He did not see the dim white faces of the people at the tables nor of the orchestra beyond, sitting with their instruments on their knees, listening like all the others as if they had never heard Rosie sing before. There was only the faint tinkle of a piano being played in the darkness with a precise and exciting rhythm and the figure clad in soiled white satin with rows of diamonds on one white arm. She was singing with her head raised a little, the thick white lids drooping over the big dark eyes. All the curves of her splendid body were painted in the flood of light. And through his drunkenness he experienced a sudden wild excitement, and then a sudden desire to mend his ways, to weep and to begin life anew.

The husky voice sang:

"If I could find the man I need."

The nervous jaded faces were still. The cigarettes hung glowing and still in poised fingers. No ice tinkled in the glasses.

"Rich man, poor man, beggar man, thief,
Lawyer, doctor, merchant, chief."

Hanging drunkenly to the curtains, Jim wanted to be poor so that life might be as beautiful as this song.

"I'd give all to some other girl
If I could find the man I'm looking for."

While she was still singing he made his way cautiously in the darkness toward the table behind the screen in the far corner. He wanted to get there while it was still dark because of late the people at the tables weren't simply buyers and middle westerners and people from the suburbs; they were people out of his own world who would recognize him and gossip and perhaps tell Fanny who he knew would make a terrible scene even though she didn't care about his being unfaithful. She was vain, Fanny, and couldn't bear to think that he could look at any other woman. No, Rosa's Place was becoming too fashionable to be safe any longer. And again stumbling in the dark he wished that he was poor and didn't know anybody so that he might go to the devil in his own way without people watching him and without having to think of Fanny and young Jim and Elizabeth.

"If I could find the man I'm looking for."

The song ended and from the tables in the darkness there came the faint patter of applause. There were even one or two drunken shouts. Rosie bowed quietly and moved away toward the table in the far corner of the garish smoke-filled room. She walked lightly for so big a woman, unaware of the tired faces turned toward her as she moved between the crowded tables. The applause appeared to have no effect upon her colossal indifference. And then the jazz began softly, so that its effect was insinuating and nervous, anticipating a climax which never came. The lights went up a little. One couple pushed its way to the tiny floor—a fat old man and a thin blonde girl dressed in a gown of

glittering sequins, and then another and another, a dark girl with a white face and a blond young man who was drunk and clung to her for support as they turned, a middle-aged woman and a boy of twenty, until the floor was so crowded that it was impossible to move and each couple became fixed in one spot, moving up and down obscenely in the half light to the music of muted drums and saxophones. The whole room turned grotesque and unreal. The white flesh of the women's backs and breasts caught the light and gleamed against the black coats of the men. The air was thick with smoke and the smell of bad champagne and sweat and perfume. The music grew more and more quiet until it died away so softly that for a long time the flesh in the midst of the floor kept on jiggling, unaware that it no longer had an accompaniment.

3

In the corner Rosie sat down and said affectionately, "Hello, old timer." She saw that he had his bottle of whiskey and that he was drunk already.

"I'm all right. How are you?" But his voice sounded thick.

"Not so hot."

"Whazza matter? Got the heebie jeebies again?"

She sighed, "I dunno. Nothin' much. Ain't you had enough?"

"I'll quit when I've finished this one."

She poured herself a drink and filled up the glass with ice and water. "It ain't so good, that stuff."

"What's the matter with you?" he asked again. He

wanted to feel cheery and it irritated him vaguely to find her in a mood of depression.

She pushed the thick black hair back from her white forehead and lighted a cigarette. "Nothin'. I've just had another row with Franconi."

"What about?"

"Same old thing. Because I didn't show up Wednesday night."

"He'd go broke without you."

"Yeah, but it's tiring all the same . . . always the same row over and over again. I'll quit the bastard flat one of these days."

They smoked in silence and then she said, "Yeah. It's me that's got him the carriage trade." She looked at him sharply. "Mebbe you'd better quit comin' here now that your swell friends think I'm such hot dog."

He didn't answer her. She knew that his real name was not Wilson and she knew well enough that he came out of a world of which she knew nothing, but she had no great curiosity about it all. He was a nice fellow, the nicest, she thought, that she had ever known. She needed a great deal of money and he was very generous with her. He never made scenes nor tried to beat her nor grew jealous and spiteful if he did not know where she spent every minute of her day, and because he drank too much he didn't ask too much of her in the way of love. Once she saw a picture in the newspapers of a man named Towner who must surely have been Jim, but she never bothered to ask him. She had things in her own life which she didn't want people prying

into and she saw no reason for asking other people to tell her things they didn't want to tell.

"Yeah," he repeated dully, "Franconi would go bust without you."

"What yuh been doin'?" she asked.

"A rotten dinner . . . party . . . worst I've ever been to."

"Is that why you're tight already?"

"I guess so."

"You mighta waited for me. I'd kinda like to get tight myself to-night. I ain't feelin' so good."

One of the men in the orchestra began to sing in a soft, rich, Jewish voice to the accompaniment of the muted music. They both fell silent and listened.

"The day he came along
The sun seemed brighter,
The birds all changed their song.
I waited for him night and day,
And now he's gone away.

"Since he went away
I'm nobody's girl,
And nobody seems to care.
All day I sit
Watching the street,
And in my sleep
I call him back again,
But he's gone—he's gone,
And the world has turned to gray
Since he went away."

"Cheery little song," said Rosie.

He took her hand and looked at her intently. "Gotta smile for me, baby?"

She frowned and shook her dark head. "Not to-night."

"Why not?"

"What the hell? Why should I smile? What've I got to smile about?" She became suddenly so savage that he could think of nothing to say. Then she took another drink and softly leaned over and began to stroke his thinning blond hair. "Never mind, old sport. It's all right. I'll be cheerier in a minute." She wound one of the curly strands of his hair round her finger. "It ain't you I'm mad at."

"Who are you mad at?"

"I dunno . . . Franconi, the guy that plays the pianna for me, my old man, my no good brothers, myself . . . all those damn' fools jiggling up and down out there on the floor . . . everybody, I guess, but you . . . You're so damned good to me." She kissed him on the cheek and said, "Are you comin' home with me to-night?"

In his fogged brain he had followed her only part way in the speech. He said, "D'you know, that's the way I feel about it, Rosie? You're so damned good to me. Everybody else is sick of me."

His helplessness touched her and because he was the only gentleman she had ever known, his courtesy always made her want to love him more than she did, for although she loved him with all that she felt was decent in her, there were other men whom she had loved far more, wickedly, with her body, and she felt sometimes that she was cheating

him because his nearness did not excite in her the same fire that the bodies of other men had done.

Softly she repeated, "Are you coming home with me?"

He kissed her wrist. "Yes."

A waiter came suddenly around the corner of the screen. He bent down to Rosie and whispered, "He's back again. They can't get rid of him this time."

"I'll go," she said.

Jim looked at her. "What's up?"

"Nothing. It's only Franconi again."

He tried unsteadily to rise. "Do you want me to back you up?"

"No. You'll only make it worse."

So he sat down again and watched her as she made her way through the tables to the green baize door on the opposite side of the room.

4

She knew that it wasn't Franconi she would find in the gaudy reception room and she had lied to Jim Wilson deliberately. She knew who it was the waiter meant when he said, "He's back again." And all at once she felt sick and dizzy from the intensity of the desire and the repulsion which the words aroused in her.

A month earlier, on a night when Jim had not come to her place and she was drinking at her table with Tim Jersey and a man called Reichenback who were bootleggers, the same waiter came to her and whispered a message. He said that there was a man who wanted to see her but would not give his name and would only say that she knew him

very well and that she would want to see him. At once she thought that it must be some man who had been her lover and now came back to her when she was successful and celebrated, and as she walked across the floor she thought of all the lovers out of her past, counting them over one by one. She had changed her name to be rid of them and she was certain that there was only one of them who knew that Rosie Healy was Rosa Dugan. And then it occurred to her that one of them might have come to the club by chance and, seeing her, had recognized her. But when she pushed open the baize door and found herself dazzled for an instant by the intense blaze of white light, she saw slowly that it was the one lover whom she had forgotten who was standing there leaning against the table waiting for her.

The room was small and terrible with glaring red walls and gilt chairs upholstered in poison green silk and lighted by a brilliant piercing glare of light from a small crystal chandelier that hung in the center. The man was of average height and very dark with the golden skin which Sicilians sometimes have and eyes of blackness so intense and burning that he had the air of a man who was ill. His hair was thick and black, curling and cropped close to his small head, and his body gave, even beneath the cheap blue-purple suit the impression of an intense and muscular vigor. It was like a coiled spring. He might have been twenty-five or forty-five. He had taken off his cap and was grinning, showing a row of perfect white strong teeth. In the grin there was a shadow of malice. He said, "Hello, Rosie," and waited.

She hadn't thought of Tony among the men who had kept her because Tony was different.

When he grinned she knew him at once, because it was a hard, swaggering grin and when she recognized him she was overcome sharply by a wild rush of emotion in which fear and desire and voluptuousness were strangely blended. One Rosie welcomed him as a man who has been thirsty for days welcomes a spring of water and the other Rosie, born since he had last seen her, was terrified and wanted to turn and lose herself in the crowd behind her. Her instinct kept warning her to flee if she was not to become a second time a slave. The first Rosie, primitive and real and sensual, knew this man. She knew the look of his body and his bullying ways and the caressing sound of his voice when he made love, and the memory of these things filled her with desire. Of all the other men she had known since there was not one like him, and in all her experience there was no passion like that passion she had known in doorways and under bridges and in the shadow of parks littered with old papers blown about by a wind that came up the river from the sea.

She didn't kiss him or even shake his hand. She simply stopped in the center of the room under the awful crystal chandelier and asked in a quiet voice, "When did you get out?"

He still grinned at her, amused and pleased perhaps that he had so disturbed her. "Oh, I bin out quite a long time. I just found out where you was. You mighta wrote me a line about it."

"A lotta good it did writin' to you."

He laughed. "I got out sooner'n I expected for being so good. Been in Buffalo and Chicago since."

He went over to her with the old possessive swagger and took her hand and at the touch of his flesh against hers, she forgot all the other men she had known. "Sit down. Let's have a talk about old times. I'd 'a' come into the club only I ain't dressed swell enough. I guess they thought I was a bum comin' to see the great Rosa Dugan." He laughed again. "The great Rosa Dugan! But you ain't Rosa Dugan to me. You're my sweetheart . . . Rosie Healy." They both sat down and he said, "You might order somethin' to drink. This ain't the Sahara or anything, izzit?"

She called a waiter and ordered whiskey, wondering all the while that even prison had not changed Tony much. She knew that she herself was older and fatter and that there were lines in her face and circles beneath her eyes, but he was like a piece of steel which nothing changed, and she kept seeing his body and thinking of his snakelike embraces. There was something in his hands and in his muscles, in the intense black eyes and the thick black hair which other men didn't have. It was a thing which filled her with excitement and kindled her own wild vitality.

He drank, but she could not lift her glass without having him see that her hand was trembling and she was determined that he should not suspect what was happening in her body.

She asked, "What you doin' now?"

"Same old thing with a little bootleggin' on the side."

"Lots of jack?"

"No, all the dough goes to bastards at the top." He

looked at her sharply. "And you—you're doin' pretty well, ain't you, kid? I hear you're making a grand a week and commish on the side. Pretty good for Rosie Healy."

"Yeah, pretty good for Rosie Healy."

"Did ya change your name to get rid of me for good?"

"Mebbe."

He saw that changing her name hadn't made any difference. She was the same Rosie Healy. She was looking at him in the same way, just as if he'd left her only yesterday instead of years ago, and she thought she was fooling him and not showing it. She was trying to think up something and saying as little as possible.

"But I ain't goin' back to you," she said suddenly. "Don't kid yourself about that."

"I ain't never kidded myself."

"Not after the deal you gave me. I've had enough of that. I learned how to get along without you. I ain't goin' back now."

"I ain't never asted you, have I?"

"And don't keep looking at me like that either. That cake-eatin' look ain't gonna get you anywhere."

"No?" But he went on looking at her just the same, thinking that he'd never had another woman like this one.

"No, I don't wanna ever see you again. I'm through, see? I'm on my own now and I'm never gonna get tied up with a man again like I was tied up with you. I'm not gonna begin keepin' a bum like you." She talked wildly, as if she were talking to herself in an empty room.

"I ain't ast yuh, have I?"

But he was asking her. His eyes, his body, his whole

spirit was asking her. "I can say one thing, Rosie. I ain't ever seen another woman like you. They're all small time compared to you."

"Yeah. I've heard that before."

"Gimme a light off your cigarette."

She raised her cigarette and as he lighted his, their hands touched again for an instant and he allowed his to run softly down her arm as he drew away.

"Go on away," she said in a low voice. "Let me alone. See? I don't wanta see you again. You've done me enough harm. The old man nearly killed me for the last time I went with you."

"Yeah. I heard all of that and a lot more."

"Who told you?"

"Who d'you think?"

"My brother Tim."

He didn't answer her and she said quietly, "He mighta kept his nose out of this after all I've done for him." She tossed her cigarette into the whiskey glass. "I gotta go back and sing now and I mean what I said. I don't wanta see you again. I'm through. See?"

But she didn't go. She still stood there thinking wildly. "Where does he live? How can I find him if I want to see him again?"

He tossed his cigarette in the whiskey glass. "You're goin' away . . . flat, just like that, as if we hadn't never been anything to each other."

"That was a Hell of a long time ago."

He cocked his head on one side and screwed up his

burning black eyes. "You ain't divorced me or anything without my knowin' it?"

"No."

"Then you're still my wife. You ain't found anybody else you wanted to marry?"

"No, there ain't anybody else I wanta marry."

"Nobody in all the time since I got sent up?"

"No . . . no." She didn't tell him that once or twice when she was tired she'd had the thought that it would be nice to be married to a gentle drunk like Jim Wilson. But that was impossible anyway and it wasn't decent to marry a fellow like that knowing all the time that you couldn't be faithful to him.

Tony was saying, "So you want me to beat it for good?"

"Yeah." (But I don't want you to go. I won't sleep nights for thinking about you. There ain't another guy in the world that's a man like you . . .)

"What about somethin' to eat when you get through your racket?"

"No . . . no."

"I can't come in there. I ain't dressed right. Come on . . . what about a bite at Jake's Place . . . for old time's sake."

She looked away from him and she felt that she was losing herself in a fog. She was moving on and on toward some catastrophe, whirled round and round by liquor and despair and desire.

"Come on . . . for old time's sake. Think of them nights in the park. I'll bet you ain't had anything like that since."

She knew that if she went with him even for an hour, it

would begin all over again and there could be no end to it but a bad one. She told herself that he was a bum, a cokey, a gunman. She told herself that he'd probably kill her some night when he was all coked up. And she heard her own voice saying, "All right . . . this once."

"When are you through?"

"Now . . . after I've sung two songs."

"I'll wait for you . . . Give me a kiss, baby."

She kissed him and thought, "What the Hell? What does it matter what happens to me? Drinkin' and lovin' is all I'm made for and there never was a man like Tony for lovin'. That's real, anyway. That's something you can get your teeth into." She was trembling and her face was hot. At the touch of his body all the other men she had known simply melted away, forgotten. She kept hearing her father say, screaming at her from his wheel chair still holding in his hand the money she'd given him, "You're goin' to Hell and you're gonna burn to a cinder. That's what's gonna happen to you, you little ——." Well, she was goin' to Hell anyway because there wasn't any place else for her. She was going round and round, down and down in a whirlpool . . .

And then she heard somebody screaming at her and turning she saw Franconi's fat, little, black, beetle body in the doorway.

She pushed Tony away from her and yelled at Franconi, "Aw, go to hell!" and turning went through the door back into the stinking, smoky night club, and in a little while Tony, sitting beside his whiskey under the harsh glare of light, heard the warm husky voice singing,

"But it ain't no use
Trying to leave my man
Cause there ain't another
He ain't got a brother
I love that man and he's got me yet."

And he knew it was all right. She still belonged to him.

In a little while she came out looking very grand in a mink coat and together they got into a taxi and rode west off the asphalt onto the cobblestones and ended up at last in the half-lighted reaches of Tenth Avenue, in a dirty speakeasy with a low ceiling and a sour smell of slops, and Rosie, mink coat and all, felt more at home there talking to a pair of bootleggers who came up and joined Tony. It was all easy and abrupt and not like singing for the carriage trade or trying to behave well for Jim Wilson. She began to feel happy and wild in a way she hadn't felt in years.

He went home with her and the night passed in a kind of frenzy and delirium that was far more wonderful than any pleasure or any oblivion she had found in drinking, and the next day she gave him a roll of banknotes to buy himself some decent clothes because it wouldn't do to have people in a decent district like East Thirty-fifth Street see a common gunman coming to her flat. She gave him a key and told him about her friend "Mr. Wilson" and he said he understood that she had to have a lot of money on account of the old man and all her brothers and he might have to borrow off her himself now and then. So on the nights that "Mr. Wilson" came to see her, Tony stayed away.

It was the first time she'd ever lived with two men at

the same time but it didn't seem wrong to her because she loved them in different ways. Her love for Tony was like her drinking. It was fierce and uncontrollable and completely of the flesh and in it she lost herself and felt cheerful and animal.

But it didn't last for long, because after two weeks of wild passion he began, satiated, to grow sulky and to abuse her, and then one morning just before dawn she wakened to find him standing beside her bed with a pair of scissors in his hand ready to stab her. His eyes were red rimmed and dilated from drugs and dissipation and his skin was a deathly white. He'd forgotten about "Mr. Wilson" as a source of all his money and was shaken with a wave of wild, insane jealousy. He swore that he'd kill her and her lover as well, but she managed slowly to wheedle him into a better mood and got him some cocaine and presently he lay down beside her and fell asleep and slept all through the day, but on the next night he was quite as bad and kicked two chairs to bits and smashed the mirror over her dressing-table. She didn't mind all the breakage, for she was used to such things, but she did mind the mirror. To break a mirror was bad luck and the thing haunted her.

But when he had come to himself again and wakened white and shaken and sniveling as he always did after such a bout, she told him scornfully that she had finished with him for good and that if he came back again he'd find a policeman waiting at the door who'd send him for good to Sing-Sing, where he belonged. He knew that he'd never find a policeman because Rosie had reasons of her own for not being too intimate with the police, but he did disappear

again back into the city. She did not hear of him again and, worn and satiated by the wild renewal of their honeymoon, she hoped that he had gone forever.

5

That was a month before and now as she walked across the floor between the tightly pressed tables she was afraid. She thought that when she opened the green baize door leading into the garish reception room she would suddenly see a flash of fire and fall down the way she'd seen a man fall down the day before Thanksgiving in a speakeasy in the West Seventies. But she kept on walking toward the door as if she had no control over her body. It was a thing she had to do even if she had known that on the opposite side of the door there was a bottomless abyss. The door seemed suddenly to be advancing toward her. She'd quite forgotten herself and was thinking only that she must keep Tony from coming into the club and shooting Jim, who was too drunk to defend himself. The door kept coming toward her and suddenly it was opened.

He didn't kill her. He didn't even appear to have a gun. He was sitting quietly on one of the poison green chairs waiting for her to come through the door. He didn't have the gray hat he'd bought with her money but held between his knees a dirty brown cap. His long, thick, black hair was rumpled and untidy and a lock of it hung over one eye, very black against his ashen face. His shirt was soiled and torn and the decent suit she'd bought him was spotted with grease and one of the sleeves was torn. He hadn't shaved in two days and his chin was covered with a thick blue-

black stubble. His eyes were red and one of them was nearly swollen shut.

During the instant that she stood in the doorway she felt no pity for him, nor any desire, but only disgust. He seemed to her merely filthy and disgusting. It was not *this* Tony who could do with her what he liked. It was a Tony who was swagger and neat with the neatness of a professional killer, hard and a little brutal, with the energy of a coiled spring. Yet it was this shattered, dirty Tony of whom she was afraid because when he was like this he was a coward and a bully, treacherous and whining and unpredictable in his actions. The Tony she loved might beat her but that she did not mind. Now she tried to conceal her fear in a manner of bravado and scorn but she kept thinking, "Some day he will kill me when he is like this."

She stepped boldly up to him and said, "Well?"

He didn't get up but only said in a low, sullen voice without looking at her, "You gotta take me back. You gotta."

"Why?"

"Lookit me."

"Well, did I do that to you?" He didn't answer and she said, "I did my best to make something decent out of you." She lighted a cigarette to show him that she wasn't afraid and said slowly, "I'm not gonna take you back, and I'd be damned thankful if you'd give me back my keys."

His eyes shifted so that he didn't look at her. "I can't give 'em back. I ain't got 'em. I lost 'em Tuesday night in Jake's Place."

"I suppose you're lyin' again."

"I ain't lyin'," he repeated sullenly. "I lost 'em."

"Will you let me have 'em if I can find 'em on you?"

For a moment he hesitated and then he said dully, "Yeah." He got up and stood with his arm outstretched as if he was quite used to being searched and she went through his pockets one by one. She didn't find the keys but she found what she knew she'd find—a small pistol, beautiful, blue-black and shining, scarcely bigger than the palm of her hand.

"I see you got a gat."

"Well, there ain't anything funny about that."

She held it up, inspecting it casually, looking up from it presently with that expression of contempt which he hated. "Pretty little thing. You wouldn't be a man without it, would yuh?"

For a second a kind of dull fire glowed in his eyes. "You ain't never had a man as good as me!"

"Yeah? In one way you're all right but that don't get you so far even when you're living off women." While she was speaking she slipped the pistol gently behind her back. Then she looked at him suddenly. "Well, are you gonna beat it?"

"When you gimme the gat."

"I'm gonna keep it for a little while . . . for old time's sake . . . a kind of soovenir."

Slowly his dulled brain became aware that he'd been tricked and he moved as if to take it from her by force but she slipped behind the table. He stopped, shaking his head in a puzzled fashion. Then he said, "You dirty ——, turning on me like that."

"I ain't turning on you. When you're decent nothing could make me turn on you. I just want you to clear out of here. I'll send the gat to Jake's Place for you to-morra."

Suddenly she wasn't afraid of him any longer and a feeling of contempt for the poor sickly creature took the place of her fear. He slumped down in his chair and began to shake.

"Are you gonna beat it or have I got to get Murphy to throw you out? I don't wanta but if I have to I will."

He began to whimper. "It's a helluva way to treat me . . . after what we bin to each other."

"What about me?"

"If you'd gimme another chance . . . I'd get an honest job."

"Yeah . . . for about a week."

"I can't give you up. See? I can't. It ain't any good tryin'. I always gotta come back. Even when I was up the river I laid awake nights thinking about you. Oh, my God. That was awful." He shook his head dismally. "It ain't any use. It ain't any use. I've had other women but it ain't no use!"

She too knew that there wasn't any use pretending that she could be rid of him forever and she knew that if he came back again in ten years as he'd come back a month ago, it would begin all over again. It was as if their bodies were chained together.

She grinned suddenly and said, "Well, maybe I'd better get you shut up. This time it would be for good."

"You'd do that, would you?" He leaned across the table. He began to whimper. "Look here, let me go home with you to-night. I'll do whatever . . ."

"You can't go home with me to-night."

For a moment he regarded her in silence. "So your cake-eater is gonna be with you to-night?" She didn't answer him and he said, "You're my wife, ain't you?" dimly as if he was trying to work out something in his muddled brain.

"It ain't your fault I am."

"Look here, Rosie. If I can't go home with you I gotta sleep in the gutter."

"Where's all your tough friends?"

"I ain't got a cent. Honest to Gawd."

"All spent on sleigh rides?" Again he didn't answer her. "Well, I got a whole wad of money in the other room, but you aren't gonna get even a postage stamp."

He began again to whimper. "That's a helluva way to treat me after what we bin to each other."

"Yeah? Well, I don't see myself giving you money to go out and get all coked up and then come and raise Hell at my place. Lissen, Tony, I'm gonna count five and if you aren't out of here by then I'll get Murphy to throw you out."

He looked at her and made a snarling sound. "You don't dare do it."

She began. "One . . . two . . . three . . ." but he didn't stir. She waited a little while and then began again. "Four." She waited a second time and then as she said "Five" she went to the door leading to the cloak-room and opening it called out, "Murphy, will you come and bounce this bastard for me?"

Murphy came in, a huge Irishman with bulging muscles and a bright red face. He looked at Tony with his small

hard blue eyes but Tony didn't move. He sat still, looking at the floor. Then Murphy said, "Are you gonna get out or be thrown out?" And as if a match had been touched to powder Tony began to scream and curse hysterically, calling Rosie one vile name after another. While he was still screaming and cursing Murphy seized the collar of his coat in one hand and the seat of his trousers in the other and swept him, still kicking and cursing, through the door into the snow. Rosie picked up the dirty brown cap and threw it after him.

When Murphy came in again, she said, "If he comes back again, Murphy, don't let him in." She handed him the beautiful, shining black pistol. "And keep that among your soovenirs."

As she moved away toward the green baize door, Murphy looked after her and little wrinkles of mirth and admiration appeared about his tiny bright blue eyes and the corners of his good-natured mouth. He thought, "How did she get that gat away from him? She's a smart one, she is . . . Irish right through and through and she can look out for herself." And then, "I never seen a woman with a walk like that. It's enough to make a holy father leave his home. That Wilson fella is a lucky guy."

6

Back again in the smelly night club, she found her way blocked by dancers who had overflowed the floor and she stood there for a moment watching them, thinking idly what fools they were and how half witted they were to put these contortions in a subway atmosphere under the head of

pleasure, and idly and regretfully she wondered if any of them in the stuffy room had ever known the depths of real pleasure or the wildness of that passion which bound her and Tony so hopelessly together. Most of them, she thought, didn't even guess what passion might be. They took it out in pinching and pawing, especially the sickly, white, fat old men.

For some reason she'd always taken them all for granted before to-night, scarcely seeing them, and now she saw them clearly, first as a mass of flesh palpitating and jiggling and thought, "Why don't they be honest and go home to bed?" And then as individuals, beautiful and silly, ugly and repulsive, fatuous and stupid, and she suddenly felt for them all that same sick contempt she had felt for Tony, soiled, bleary-eyed and whimpering, a little while before. She was sick of everything.

Somebody in the orchestra began to sing again, "Dance, dance, dance, little lady," and the music began to die away and she fell to thinking about Jim. She was afraid now to take him home with her, but she wanted him to come with her, and maybe it wouldn't be dangerous now that she'd got the gun away from Tony. And maybe he *was* telling the truth about the keys because they weren't in any of his pockets and usually everything which Tony possessed was carried in the pockets of the one suit he owned. She ought to prevent Jim from going home with her to-night but she didn't want to return alone to the flat, and with her repulsion for Tony the old affection for Jim had come back to her, stronger than ever. The memory of the broken mirror still frightened her, but she told herself that Jim needed

cheering to-night. He was more unhappy than usual and needed her to buck him up. Maybe his wife was one of those society women and maybe she'd raised worse Hell than usual to-night. But she had to think of protecting him. Maybe Tony had lied about the keys and would return to the flat after all and kill them both.

The music stopped and through the crowd she walked back to the table behind the screen, thinking on the way that she'd send Jim to his own home or to a hotel. She didn't mind facing Tony alone if he turned up, not even if he tried to kill her. And then as she came round the corner of the screen she saw that Jim had fallen forward on the table and was asleep with his head buried in his arms. She spoke to him but he didn't answer and she prodded and shook him but he only groaned a little. She knew then that he had passed out cold and that there wasn't anything to do but to take him back to the flat with her.

She summoned Murphy and together they got him out of the back door, down the alley and into a taxicab. The blowing snow was thicker than ever and all the doorways were piled deep with drifts. In the corner of the taxi Jim lay back unconscious, snoring, with his mouth hanging open.

CHAPTER VIII

JANIE FAGAN was a modern actress. She was a clever and efficient actress. She dressed well and never forgot her lines and she had read Freud and Jung and wanted to play Hedda Gabler. The critics and even a part of her

public she had succeeded in seducing, not physically, but intellectually by a shrewd and carefully planned campaign in which she assumed the pretensions of an "intellectual" actress. And since she encountered few people, either among critics or the public, more intelligent than herself and a countless number who were less cultivated, there were only a few who ever saw through her pretense and none who took the trouble to expose it. A large part of the public and one or two critics were completely subject to her mannerisms and went to the theater not to see a play but to see an actress called Janie Fagan who had a way of thrusting out her chin at the slightest excuse in order to show the beautiful line of her throat, and whose voice in emotional moments was a cross between the cooing of a turtle dove and the chest notes of a full-bosomed contralto, and who in moments of intensity kept pressing her handkerchief, rolled into a sodden ball, against the tip of her snub nose. Matinée ladies, when they saw her in a new rôle, thought first of all with delight and satisfaction that here was their darling Janie once more. They watched eagerly for her tricks and if they missed them left the theater with a sense of disappointment and a conviction that the play was bad and gave their darling no real opportunity. One of the more coquettish critics usually wrote of her when she appeared in a new piece, "That roguish imp Janie Fagan is back again." It was only by chance that she played the woman existing in the brain of the helpless and frustrated author of a piece, but since she had "a following" the dramatist benefited on the side of his pocket, and no dramatist had ever had the courage to say that he did not want her

in his play. She was an actress who excited women and young girls.

She was not Irish, as her name might have implied, but the daughter of an insignificant man called Everhardt, now dead, who had been superintendent of the high school in Cordova, Indiana, and of a plump, red-faced, almost illiterate woman whom Professor Everhardt had married during his early youth in an unusual moment of passion and poor judgment. Janie, by good fortune, inherited the physical vitality and full-blooded beauty of Mrs. Everhardt. But this mother was kept in the background and lived quietly and respectably as a widow in a small house on the outskirts of Cordova. She would have been the very paragon of stage mothers, but the shrewdness and ambition of her daughter kept her from fulfilling the rôle clearly designed for her by God and nature. For Janie Fagan knew that in the moments when she needed protection she was quite able to protect herself, not only against the seducers and roués who were believed to be lying in wait for young actresses but from managers and agents who were sometimes even more evil and rapacious. Janie's black hair and gray eyes were less romantically Gaelic in origin than stolidly and respectably Bavarian.

In her career there was no romantic or startling episode by which she leapt into fame overnight, but only a gradual building up upon a solid foundation composed of intelligence and shrewdness, hard work and an understanding of modern publicity. She was altogether modern, respectable, and with none of the romantic nonsense which cluttered the lives of such women as Duse and Bernhardt and Rachel.

But among the stones in the foundation of her success there were none which could possibly have been chiseled with the word "scruples."

In spite of this she had managed to create about herself the illusion of romance and the shining cloud of glamor which has always been the right of actresses. In these things she herself believed profoundly and by her belief she was able to convince others that it was so. Only few suspected that Janie Fagan was not necessarily endowed by God and nature with a genius for the theater and that she would have been equally successful if she had chosen to be a milliner, a baker or a school-teacher. She was of those possessed by the demon of ambition and this demon gave her no peace. It forced her at times to work herself thin and haggard, to cheat and steal from others in order to get what she wanted, to lie and to act rôles off the stage as well as on which were wholly false and hypocritical. When earlier in her career she had known occasional shadowy pangs of conscience she stifled them by telling herself something which was more true than most things she told herself—that she was alone in a city and in a profession where few had scruples when it was a question of success. It was a world, she soon learned, already too filled with people more gifted and more clever than herself, and so she found herself forced, not too unwillingly, to use other weapons with which God had endowed her. By acting off the stage as well as on she managed to create an illusion of helplessness and the tricks had gone on for so long a time that they had become a habit and the natural Mary Eberhardt had long since been completely lost in the spurious

personality of Janie Fagan, one of the cleverest and most promising actresses of Broadway.

It was really church bazaars and Sunday School entertainments which had ruined Mary Eberhardt and diverted her from the career destined by God. From the age of four she had always been placed first on all programs as the star among all the becurled and bedecked children who gave recitations and did imitations. By the age of twelve flattery and the sense of stardom had so bedazzled her that from then on she was lost forever to Cordova and Professor and Mrs. Eberhardt. From that moment it was but a matter of time and adolescence until New York claimed her, for the demon of ambition had so eaten into her bosom that only New York was worthy of easing the pangs that gnawed there. The rest of America did not count.

2

So when she turned from the mirror bordered by telegrams to smile at her public as Philip Dantry pushed his way rudely and ardently into her dressing-room, the smile was a professional smile. She was acting at the moment the rôle of a great actress receiving an ovation. And when she smiled at Philip it was a professional smile but also, as he had hoped, a special one. It was the smile of a great actress reserved for the rich and fashionable lover in favor at the moment; and both smiles were singularly like the smiles she had bestowed, at the age of twelve respectively, upon the public of the First Methodist Church of Cordova and upon Willie Simpson, her first beau, when he presented her at the age of fourteen with a grubby bar of chocolate

after she had finished reciting "The Wreck of the Hesperus." In reality there was no more of genuine glamor or romance in the later than in the earlier smile, for she was by instinct respectable and looked upon love affairs for the sake of love as sinful. But at the moment she smiled she believed that she was at least Rachel smiling upon an hysterical audience at the Théâtre Français and upon de Musset.

3

When at last the dressing-room had cleared a little, she urged the remaining friends to leave while she dressed and sent her maid Octavia, who was black but comely and came from Harlem, to search out Philip from his refuge behind the property rock from which she threw herself into the sea in the big moment at the end of act two. This Octavia was a good-natured negress who was not quite bright and had a habit of being amused by almost anything and of throwing open her mouth until her tonsils were exposed in mule-like gusts of laughter. Out of this single eccentricity Janie Fagan had managed to create a character for Octavia. It was a character which she imposed upon the real Octavia much as the character of Janie Fagan had been heroically imposed upon the shrewd and commonplace Mary Eberhardt. She was always attributing to Octavia remarks and comments which in reality had never occurred to Octavia, and at times she even went so far as to place negro jokes which she read in comic papers in the mouth of Octavia. When Janie took to relating these stories in front of the somewhat startled Octavia, the negress would merely cry out, "Why, Miss Janie, I never said no such thing!" and

open her mouth in a mule-like gust of laughter, which only made people believe them the more and think how devoted Octavia was to her mistress.

In truth Octavia was devoted not to her mistress but to the theatrical life. She was stage-struck and she stayed on and on with Miss Fagan, in spite of the mean treatment which sometimes took place in private, only through a fear that if she left she might lose forever the glamor of footlights and of seeing actors in greasepaint and of standing in the wings to set Miss Fagan's dress straight before she went on and of opening her telegrams and laying them out for her. Octavia had a soul born for the theater and nothing in life to her was so real as what went on while she was standing in the wings. Like all people who really belong in the theater the three-hundredth performance of the play in which she herself was concerned was more exciting to her than the first. So when she went in search of Philip and found him behind the rock from which Miss Fagan threw herself at the end of the second act, it was to her not a *papier-mâché* rock at all but pure granite and she was not a negro maid from Harlem but a serving maid going romantically to fetch her mistress' lover to a tryst. And nobody, not even in the days of Edwin Booth, could have acted the rôle of lover more perfectly than Philip. He was waiting behind the rock, dusty and miserable, now hot, now cold, for Octavia's message of hope.

When he came into the dressing-room Janie was acting the rôle of the chaste young girl. She called to him from beyond some curtains of striped red and gold, "Wait there

for me. I'm dressing now," as if no man had ever seen her save fully dressed and wrapped in furs.

Philip, still trembling a little with his love and the excitement of what he meant to say to her, seated himself on the *chaise longue,* lighted a cigarette and thought, "How like her! Even in the midst of the theater she has not lost her modesty." One moment he was transformed by the happiness simply of being near her in that room filled with things which belonged to her and the next moment he was miserable with the terror that he might never possess her. He suffered at the thought that even if she consented to marry him their love would have to wait until they were married and that of course she would not marry him at once.

He hated lap dogs but he allowed her Pekinese to leap onto the *chaise longue* beside him and he even fell to stroking it, forgetting in the thought that her hands had fondled it, that it was a horrid yapping little beast. And as he stroked it he felt that his glances, despite himself, kept wandering toward the gold and striped curtains seeking some glimpse of her lovely body, and he was ashamed that he should have so gross a feeling about any one so sweet, so pure and so unaffected as Janie. And again he was thankful to that fantastic ideal which had kept his body as pure as hers. It would be the kind of marriage he had meant his marriage to be, and as he sat there, the memory of his Aunt Nancy returned to him again. He saw her hurrying toward him pure and lovely in the white dress . . . He understood suddenly for the first time that it was really on account of her that he had kept so harsh a rein upon his desires.

4

Behind the gold and red striped curtain as she dressed, Janie was thinking how handsome he had looked as he stood in the doorway and that beneath his well-fitting clothes there must be a splendid body which would have delighted any woman, even if it had not been the body of a young man who was rich and fashionable, and for a moment she came as near to fleshly desire as she had ever come. Although the thought gave her a new and rather disturbing excitement, it was quite lost before the knowledge that she had within her reach the one thing which she needed to make her career complete. If she married him she would be both rich and fashionable and she would have in his world a place which otherwise she would never have. In the back of her mind a little voice kept saying, "Mary Eberhardt has come a long way. Mary Eberhardt has come a long way."

For she knew that he meant to ask her to marry him and she had known it ever since he had said to her, looking at her with his blue eyes shining, "Does it make a difference then if I am there?" She was certain that it was marriage which he sought and nothing else, for she had had experience with the other thing and men who wanted merely to sleep with you betrayed their intentions before they actually put them into words. And she thought how lucky it was that the man who asked to make her wealthy and give her a position should also be so handsome and attractive. It was true, she told herself, that he was not brilliant or amusing, but one couldn't expect everything. And while

Octavia slipped her dress over her head she began acting to herself the rôle of a woman who was passionately in love—a pure woman to whom love would be an awakening and the exploring of a new land, and she began to say to herself phrases that she believed were original but which really came out of her memories of novels. She thought of "his dear dark head" and of "how she loved the way his hair grew at the back of his neck" and of his "strong hands" and the "way his lips curled at the corners" and "the touch of his strong hand on her arm when he helped her across the crowded street."

By the time she had fixed the wave in her shining black hair, powdered her pretty nose and slipped on her hat, she was quite in love with him and even filled with a certain desire born perversely of the brain and the imagination rather than of the heart or the flesh, and it was not, after all, difficult because he was young and fresh and handsome and charming beside the distasteful memories of Duncan Kane, the actor, and Herman Livingstone, the manager.

She parted the curtains and stood before him, slender and swaying a little, her lips parted in a tender smile. "I'm ready, Philip! I didn't want to eat in a restaurant so I had Octavia fix up a little supper in my flat. We'll be alone there. You don't mind, do you?"

Mind? His heart leapt. It was perfect now. He would have her alone. He could tell her how much he loved her, and there would be no one there to share her with him even by looking at her. As he watched her he couldn't even speak. His love was so great that it hurt him.

5

She lived in a flat on the third floor of a remodeled brownstone house in the East Fifties. There was no doorman and no elevator man and they let themselves in with a key. It was a modest flat for an actress so well known and one who was always certain of an engagement, but Janie was comfortable in it and it allowed her to lay by at least half of what she earned. She did not waste her money in extravagant living, and things like furs and jewels were frequently given her by admirers who got for their pains little more than the dubious pleasure of giving her such presents. Friends invested her money for her so that what she referred to with a toss of her head as her "little nest egg" was constantly hatching into other nest eggs. And now that she was marrying Philip, who was himself a stock broker, he could manage all her investments and she wouldn't need any longer to be under the least obligation to any one.

Standing close to her as they ascended heavenward in the little elevator, Philip felt suddenly overwhelmed with a desire to kiss her but checked himself for fear that she might not like it and so be put into a bad humor at the moment he meant to propose to her.

There was no one in the flat for even the negro servants went home to Harlem in the evening, but in the sitting-room before the fire there was a table spread with cold chicken and ham, sandwiches, and an electric coffee machine. It was a small cozy room furnished with low comfortable chairs and adorned with photographs and draw-

ings of Janie in various poses and rôles, all oddly enough with her chin thrust forward to show the swanlike line of her throat. Women admirers and young girls had told her that in this pose she looked exactly like Duse.

With a hoydenish gesture she pulled off her hat and threw it and her coat on the divan, tossing back her head with an abandon which said, "Now I am free. I am a woman, no longer an actress chained to my Art." And almost at once she began to enact the rôle of a young housewife who adored cooking.

He still watched her, too fascinated by her charm and vivacity to speak, so she pulled his coat from his shoulders and said, "Come along, we'll scramble some eggs in the kitchen."

He looked at her in sudden astonishment. "But aren't you tired . . . after to-night . . . a first night?"

She laughed and tossed her dark curls. "I'm never tired unless things go wrong and to-night everything went beautifully."

"You're a wonderful woman," he said.

She patted his shoulder: "You're a darling. Come along." And she took his hand and dragged him toward the kitchen, where she began with little fluttering movements to take eggs from the refrigerator, pans from the shelves and butter, pepper and salt from the cupboard beside the stove. She began to talk the way people talk in bad social comedies, the way "society" people are supposed to talk; and he should have seen that there was something false and silly in her manner but he was too be-glamored to see anything.

He was overcome with astonishment that she could cook.

"Oh, I haven't always been the famous actress. I was a simple little girl once. I used to help my mother cook."

The eggs began to sizzle and she stirred them expertly, for she did whatever she did, well and efficiently, however lacking it might be in inspiration, and while she stirred she told him little anecdotes of her girlhood, dwelling upon its simplicity and its sylvan charm, falling again into phrases which she believed quite original although again they were only the residue of countless romantic novels.

Watching her while she stirred the eggs, he kept thinking how pretty she looked in an apron with her cheeks flushed by the heat of the stove, and how wonderful she was to have come alone to New York, simple and innocent, to make for herself a career.

When the eggs were finished he carried them into the sitting-room and while they ate supper she told him of the early days when she had walked the pavements for days looking for a chance at a part and how there had been times when she had had only one meal a day (which was true but less frequent than she led him to suppose). Listening to her he was aware of a kind of intimacy, of a coziness, which he had imagined but never before realized. To be alone with her thus in this pretty room with its bright chintzes and pillows seemed to him a taste of paradise. If, he thought, they could only go on thus for the rest of their lives alone, sharing this intimacy with no one, never submitting to the indecent tyranny of her public. There were times when the idea of her being an actress shocked him, not because he had any ideas regarding

the supposed immorality of theatrical people, but because he could not bear the thought of her acting upon a stage beneath the glare of lights before hundreds of people, playing at love and tragedy and desire while these strangers watched her morbidly. It seemed to him an indecency. He wondered wildly if she could ever love him enough to give up all that life and almost at once he thought, "How can I expect that? I don't even know whether she'll marry me. What have I to offer her?" And immediately he plunged from the heights of happiness to the depths of despair.

It was over the coffee that he thought suddenly, "I can't endure this uncertainty any longer. I can't endure this false happiness. I've got to settle it now." He flushed and heard himself saying, "Janie, there's something I've meant to ask you for a long time." And then he halted, panic-stricken by the sound of his own voice.

Reaching across the table she touched his hand. "Let's sit in front of the fire and talk about life. You're a darling, Philip."

She rose and turned out all the lights save the lamp that stood on the table beside the big chair. He wondered, "Does she guess what I mean to say and is putting me off?" He pulled up a chair and sat beside her. Taking his hand, she said, "This *is* cozy. You're not in a hurry to go home?"

"No, I don't ever want to go."

She was thinking that he was certain now to propose and that she needed only to be kind in order to give him the courage, and for a moment she was moved by his

awkward, gentle shyness. But she had not the time to consider it, for her brain was rushing on, busy with the thoughts of new triumphs of publicity. She saw her picture in all the papers, and headlines: "Prominent young club man weds popular actress." If only it could happen to-morrow, on the very day when the notices of the new play appeared, she would dominate all the news of the day. People would come to the theater in droves to see her, just because she was married, as lewd old women came to weddings, and those first trying days after an opening would be tided over. While she was thinking all this, her small pretty mouth was fixed in a charming smile, the lips slightly parted the way they were parted in the third act when she was enacting "tender interest" while Mervyn made love to her and her thoughts wandered to speculation as to the visibility from the front of the spot on her gown.

He was silent for a long time and at last he said, "I want to ask you something tremendous, Janie, I've never done it before. I mean I've never asked it of any other woman, so I'm not very good at it." Then with an heroic effort he said it. "I want you to marry me."

She looked at him, smiling, and then began to laugh so that he grew cold with the fear that she thought him ridiculous. But she squeezed his hand and said, "You old darling! I knew what was on your mind; it's all right. I meant to marry you all along, if you ever gave me the chance." It was only in the next moment that she realized she had spoken a line from the first piece in which she had ever played.

Then she rose and sat on his lap and put her arms about

his neck and the scent of her dark shining hair and of the perfume she used filled him with intoxication. His heart beat wildly and the veins on his temples throbbed. It was a happiness that was both ecstasy and pain, and then suddenly it was past, and she was kissing him. He did not believe that love could be as insane as this.

She let her head rest on his shoulder and for a long time they sat thus in silence with eyes half closed staring into the fire and saying nothing, listening to the howl of the blizzard against the cornices. And, at last, he sighed and murmured, "Darling, there was never any one as happy as this."

She, too, was happy because for a little while she had forgotten herself and her career, and in this relaxation she found a sensual peace, not at all like the mad happiness of success. Suddenly she felt tired, and a sudden desire to stay thus, resting always, crossed her mind like a shadow but turned at once into a fear that she was tired because she was no longer a young girl. She thought wildly, "I will draw youth and strength from him." It was more pleasant than she had ever imagined, lying thus in his arms, being loved with this strange shy respect where before she had known only greediness.

She heard him saying, "I think there's one thing I'd like to tell you." He hesitated for a moment and then said shyly, "Maybe you'll think it's silly. It's a funny ideal I've had always. There's never been any other woman. I've kept myself for my wife. I'm coming to you as pure as you are."

At first the speech frightened her and made her ashamed

and then it seemed to her fantastic and then it troubled her a little because it seemed beautiful. She knew that Philip was no weakling. She knew he was a man and an attractive man and such a thing couldn't have been easy for him. Then she thought, "He doesn't suspect anything so I'll never need confess. I'll let him go on. He'll be happier like that. If he's as innocent as that he'll never suspect anything." And suddenly she experienced a strange wave of perverse pleasure that she should be the first woman to possess this strong young body. It was like the passion of old men for virgins.

"Of course it isn't silly. It's beautiful. It makes me want to cry."

She kissed him again, this time less passionately for she was fearful that the first kiss might have been too passionate and experienced for a woman who had never had a lover. Then she lay back again in his arms and the shrewd restless brain began to work again, killing all her tenderness and affection. She thought, "What if some one should tell him things against me which he might believe? A man who'd have such fantastic ideas might not go through with it and I'd lose everything."

Desire again stirred in her body, the same perverse excitement roused by his virginity.

She kissed his cheek and said softly, "Don't go away, darling. Don't ever leave me again." Then she sighed. "I'm so tired and so lonely. Life's been so hard for me."

He answered her in his deep warm voice, "I won't ever leave you again. We'll never be parted."

"Don't go," she said, slowly, "even to-night. Don't go."

She felt his body stiffen slightly and she knew that she had shocked him, and quickly she said, "Stay! We'll be married to-morrow. Let this be our wedding night. It's so perfect. It was meant to be with the storm outside and the wind howling in the chimney and us so cozy in here alone together."

She felt the passion returning to him. He said softly, "Do you mean that?"

But she did not answer him. She kissed him again and then leaning back she switched off the lamp so that there was only firelight and darkness. She knew that he was shy.

He did not speak again. The clock struck two, and after a long time he rose in silence and, holding her close to him, carried her into the bed-room. He was still dazed and a little frightened but he thought suddenly, "It is all more wonderful and beautiful than I had ever imagined."

And even upon her wedding night she continued to act. This time she enacted the rôle of a virgin, innocent and timid and frightened.

CHAPTER IX

RUBY WINTRINGHAM, staring into the fire and thinking back over all that had happened to her, was roused by the sound of a clock somewhere among the distant towers striking the hour of two. She had not thought of the time because she had been so lost in the romantic, sentimental lingering over her past, and when she heard

the clock strike she was suddenly angry at Melbourn for having kept her up to such an hour, even though he was coming to ask her to be his wife. She thought, "Perhaps he's not coming at all. Perhaps Mrs. Towner has got the better of him and won't let him come." And then she thought that, being Melbourn, nothing, least of all poor Fanny Towner, could stop him from doing what he meant to do, and she put down the book which she hadn't read and went down the hall to the pantry to fetch whiskey and soda and ice and cigars so that when he came he would be comfortable.

She wasn't any longer even irritated by the memory of Fanny Towner but only felt a sense of pity and of astonishment that any woman however foolish, could have made such an exhibition of herself before a man like Melbourn. If she'd been his mistress, she must have known that what she did was the best means of annoying him and making him hate her. There was something pitiful, she decided, in the spectacle of a woman seeking so desperately for a kind of love which she would never find because it was too late. The best a woman like Fanny Towner could hope for was a love affair which satisfied her body and permitted her to imagine that she was a romantic woman. Romantic love didn't happen at the borders of middle age. At forty it was something desperate and unsatisfactory, because at that age people hadn't any longer a capacity for losing themselves in each other. They were too set and hardened by all that had happened to them in the past.

As she put the whiskey on the little table by the fire

she thought that Melbourn, coming in so late, might be hungry, and she went to the kitchen and, slicing bread, made him sandwiches of lettuce and mayonnaise and a bit of cold tongue she found in the ice box, thinking all the time that in all her friendship with Melbourn he had never once mentioned Mrs. Towner's name, and wondering how so clever and intelligent a man could ever have been caught by a woman so shallow and silly.

She put the sandwiches on the table with the whiskey and soda and placed a bowl of daffodils beside them. The bell of the telephone rang gently and she went to answer it quickly before its sound wakened Ralph. When she returned she threw a log of wood on the fire and looked at herself in the mirror. She put more rouge on her lips and softening the look of her sleek hair with a pat of the hand, she went to the door and opened it. Then she returned and stood leaning against the mantelpiece in the flame-colored tea gown, waiting for him.

2

When Melbourn stepped out of the elevator, he found the door of the penthouse open, and without knocking he went in and left his coat and hat on the chest in the hall. It wasn't any longer a strange hall, for he had come to know it well since that autumn night when he met Ruby at dinner on Long Island and motored her home. He saw now that the ride back to town had marked the beginning of the end of his affair with Fanny, because Ruby had made Fanny seem cheap and silly. He saw to-night quite clearly that Ruby was the real thing and that Fanny

was only a fraud and an imitation. Ruby was all that Fanny through want of character had tried to be and failed.

As he entered the house he wasn't thinking of Ruby's beauty or of her desirability as a woman but of her poise and common sense and charm and all the qualities which he liked in a woman and which could be of great use to him. He was thinking of her, coldly, as he might have considered a man whom he chose as a partner in a dangerous enterprise, so when he pushed open the door of the sitting-room and saw her in the crimson gown leaning against the mantelpiece, all his calculations were suddenly blown to pieces by the impact of her beauty. It seemed to him that he saw her for the first time and for the first time he saw that he was not old and tired and that his affair with Fanny had not failed because he was an old man. At the sight of Ruby, poised not without calculation with one arm on the mantelpiece, he knew that he was really in love, as he had once been many years before. This woman excited him and the knowledge of his excitement and desire made him think, "I am young! I am vigorous! Everything isn't finished!" But at the same time he knew that he must keep his head and not make a fool of himself. He flushed but otherwise he managed to contrive an entrance that was quite casual.

She said "Hello" and smiled, holding out her hand and waiting for him to cross the room toward her and he wanted to smile because he saw at once that she meant him to make all the advances. He thought, "She is clever. She knows the game." And then, "How unlike Fanny."

But he hesitated for a moment before speaking and then said somewhat awkwardly, "I apologize for making you wait so long. I hadn't thought very clearly what I was asking you to do."

"I don't mind. I usually read until quite late anyway."

"I wouldn't have asked you at all except that it was important." Then suddenly he noticed the sandwiches and the whiskey and cigars laid out on the table beside the bowl of daffodils he himself had sent and he thought again, "How charming!" and "How unlike Fanny!" She offered him the whiskey and sandwiches and he was aware suddenly of a kind of stiffness and restraint which he never experienced. Somehow she had made him feel awkward without at all losing her own poise.

"Thanks," he said and waited for her to pour the whiskey.

"Say when."

"When."

As she put down the bottle he saw again what he had noticed on that first evening months ago,—that she had what he had described to himself as "the gift of intimacy." She had a way of brushing aside all coquetry and nonsense and pretense and taking you at once with a great directness and simplicity into the closed garden that was kept for old friends. But because he had for too long lived without friends and without intimacy he felt now that he could not enter the garden. He had forgotten how it was done. He could enter it only by a great effort of will and by demolishing all at once the long accumulated barriers that shut him in. And because so many years

had passed since he had been really in love, he did not know how he was to proceed. So he said helplessly, "They are excellent sandwiches. Did you send out for them?"

"I made them myself."

"Oh." And again the thought of Fanny returned to him. He could not picture Fanny making anything.

She laughed and said, "I *can* cook. I hate it but I can if I have to."

And then as if he were an awkward boy or a silly old man he sought refuge in a banal compliment. "You're a clever woman. I think you could do anything."

He sat down, aware that a silence had fallen between them and that on such an occasion and that at such an hour of the morning, there was no place for silence. He wanted to say directly why he had come but he simply could not utter the words, so he observed that Hector's dinner had been a terrible affair and while they talked about that and about Savina and Philip (but never once about Fanny) another part of his brain was occupied with the question of how he was to begin. At last when another silence fell between them, he plunged desperately.

"I suppose you guessed why I came to-night."

But she did not help him. She only said, "How should I guess?"

"You might have had a suspicion by now."

"Perhaps."

It occurred to him then that she did know but meant not to give away her hand. He fancied that perhaps she thought he had come to ask her to be his mistress and that

in her heart she meant to have him only as a husband. So he said bluntly, "I want you to marry me."

She tried to speak but he stopped her. "I don't want your answer yet. I don't want it until you've heard a great many things I have to tell. (He felt now that he was getting hold of himself again.) They're things you ought to know. I think it's the only fair way to arrange it."

"If it's about—"

"No, it's not about other women. Not altogether." He looked at her sharply. "I don't suppose you're a prig."

"No."

"It's more than that, and it concerns my past and my future—perhaps *our* future." He grinned and it turned out to be rather a sheepish grin. "You don't know anything about me, really. Not very many people do." He swallowed and said, "I want to talk to you as if it were a business proposition, if you'll let me. I want to put it all up to you squarely and let you choose."

3

She felt less disturbed now, because she had hoped it would be like this, orderly and business-like with no pretense at romance, because after Fred there wouldn't be any romance and trying to pretend romance could only be shocking to her. And even now she hadn't made up her mind whether she would accept or refuse him and if she decided to refuse him it would be much easier if it was all kept on a cold and orderly plane where neither of them would be swept away. But at the same time she was thinking that he had never seemed so attractive as he was

now, flushed and young-looking and a little confused. Until now she had never believed that the cold armor of his self-possession might be broken down. That, she thought, was why she was afraid of him. She'd never been able to get inside the shell of impersonality.

He rose and poured himself another glass of whiskey, lighted a cigar and seated himself with his long powerful legs thrust out toward the fire, and suddenly she was aware of a sudden sense of delight. This was a *man* as Fred had been a man, powerful in body and in brain, perhaps even coarse and vulgar, but a man unlike old Hector and young Philip and Jim Towner and Charlie Wintringham.

"I want to tell you the story of my life," he said abruptly. "It's the first time I've ever told it to any one."

"I'm flattered."

"Don't laugh at me. I'm really in earnest. I came wanting to tell you and thinking I couldn't do it, but I mean to . . . now. I see that I can, after all." He looked at her again sharply as if he was not yet certain of her and as if her remark had upset him.

"I'm not laughing . . . only what was I to say? I want to hear it."

He did not answer but fell silent suddenly, staring into the fire, as if he were alone and she were not in the room at all. She saw suddenly that his face was no longer flushed and that he looked gray and tired and extraordinarily ugly. He wasn't a young man any longer. He was middle-aged. He was old. And all at once she felt that she must speak. It was necessary to say something, anything, but she could think of nothing to say, and presently without looking at

her, he himself began to speak. "I wouldn't have annoyed you by coming here so late but I haven't had any peace of mind lately and I couldn't go on without settling things. I've been accustomed always to have my life in order with everything moving forward as it should, and lately things haven't worked that way. Everything seems to have lost its direction. Everything seems to be slithering away. I'm not interested. I don't care about things."

She was aware then that somehow the whole occasion was slipping out of her control onto a plane which she had not considered. It was becoming, in spite of all he said, emotional and she, who for a great many years had repulsed by deliberate calculation the confidences of people, began to see that he meant to tell her things which would disturb her and which she did not want to hear because it would make life difficult and complicated.

Still he kept looking away from her, staring into the fire.

"I'm going to tell you everything. I'm in love with you. That's true. But at my age and perhaps even at yours love isn't the most important thing in life. It's only important when you're in the twenties. I can't offer you that kind of love. You're intelligent enough to know that's impossible. But I do offer you love, maybe a better kind that won't burn itself out. And I offer you devotion and fidelity, absolute fidelity, if you love me at all."

It seemed to her that a strange thing was happening between them. She began to feel that she was no longer a made-up character who was a stranger even to herself, playing artificially a rôle in some bitter-sweet comedy but

that she was a woman, solid and real and perhaps even honest. The very directness of his attack instead of disconcerting her made her feel solid and honest. She could not think of anything to say but she was aware suddenly that there was no longer that sense of uncertainty and strain which had begun to weary her. This man was solid; he was a rock. He said, "You know what I can offer you in material things . . . everything that any one could want and more. I've got all the wealth any man could want and no matter what happens I shall go on growing richer and richer. Money is like that. It's something else that I want now and it's something I can't have going on alone."

He paused again, still looking away from her into the fire. He took a drink of whiskey and looked at her. "You're listening?" he asked. "You're interested?" It was the first time she had ever seen him ask sympathy or understanding of any one. She thought suddenly that he was like Savina Jerrold wanting to know what it was like to have your own business and be independent.

"I'm listening," she said, "and I'm interested."

"I'm getting ahead of my story and all that really comes at the end." He looked at her again and said, "You aren't tired? You aren't bored?"

"No."

"Are you ever bored?"

"No. Not really ever."

He turned away again toward the fire. "It's going to be a long story. If you fall asleep I won't blame you. You see, my name isn't really David Melbourn at all, or at

least it is and it isn't. My whole name is David Melbourn Higginson, but I've only used the first part of it for a great many years. I was born in the middle west, in a town in Ohio and my parents were just good Americans of New England blood with a good deal that was Scotch in them. They were never rich but after I was born things grew worse and worse. It wasn't simply poverty but the agonizing poverty of respectable people with a certain position to keep up who had to put on a brave front and pretend they weren't so poor that sometimes there wouldn't be enough to eat in the house. You see my father was a drunkard, one of the hopeless kind for whom nothing can be done. It was a disease. In times when he was sober he was an honest dignified man but when a spell came over him he'd do anything for whiskey. He was just a beast."

Watching him she fancied that he was looking away from her because he was proud and could not bear to have her see the expression in his eyes. She thought again of his curious obsession of secrecy and his passion for surrounding the smallest thing he did with profound mystery, and understood because she herself shared the passion. It had helped her to go on. What she was or what she had done was her own business. Yes, she told herself, she understood that. She couldn't have looked any one in the eye and told them the whole story of her marriage to Charlie Wintringham. He was talking again, saying, "It was a big town filled with mills and furnaces and as we got poorer and poorer we moved from one house to another, each shabbier and more run down than the last. My

mother did sewing and washed fine laces but she wasn't very strong and things went from bad to worse. Twice I remember, we were put out on the street. I was only a little boy, too small to do any work. And at last we found ourselves in a shabby house with a leaky roof on the edge of the quarter where the hunkies and dagoes who worked in the mills lived. My mother tried all the time to keep me from knowing what was the matter with my father. She pretended he was ill, which was true enough. When he came home drunk she managed to keep him out of my sight, although I remember hearing awful noises which were worse than if I'd known the truth. The awful thing was that when he was sober he was a good kind man who did his best for us, but as soon as he got work he'd get drunk and lose it, and after a while nobody would give him work. He got to be known as the town drunk. That's what is awful about drunkards. You see your friend or your father who is a nice fellow suddenly become insane, bestial and disgusting.

"I never really knew that he was a drunkard until I was eight years old. I only knew there was something dreadful always in the house with us, frightening me and slowly killing my mother. One day when I was eight, I was coming home from the grocery with a bag of beans, because at that time we were very poor and lived mostly on beans and cabbage. I had to cross an empty lot where people threw rubbish behind a high board fence covered with signs advertising circuses and patent medicines. I remember exactly how the fence looked and the name

of the circus and the pictures of the trapeze artists and a fat woman on a white horse. I haven't forgotten the smallest detail of that day. And as I crossed the lot I saw a crowd of boys in one corner throwing sticks and mud at something. They were the children of the mill families—hunkies and dagoes—and out of curiosity I went over to see what the fun was. I was only a little fellow and had to push my way through the bigger boys in order to see, and when I had pushed my way through their dirt and vermin, I saw that they were tormenting a man who sat sprawled against the fence, covered with filth and cursing his tormentors. It was my father. That's how I found out he was a drunkard."

He paused again and took another drink and his face looked gray and drawn. At length he said, "I tried to fight them off, but it wasn't any use so I ran home and got my mother and she drove off the crowd of dirty little wops and together we got him home. The funny thing was that afterward my mother and I never spoke of it, and because we couldn't talk about it a kind of strain grew up between us which made things much worse. We kept trying to pretend all the time that there wasn't anything the matter. Maybe she was right. Maybe it was the only way she could keep on living.

"I went to school in the mill part of the town because that was the law and so I never saw the boys of my own class. There were cousins in the same town who were ashamed of us and would never have anything to do with us. But I knew I didn't belong in the tenth ward among the hunkies, and I didn't find them charming or sympa-

thetic or anything else that was nice. I see now that most of them were bullies who as they grew older thought they could do as they pleased because this was a free country. At home in Europe they'd have been, most of them, sniveling servants. You see I wasn't a good democrat even then. I spent a third of my life among them but I never felt any bond between me and them. Most of the time they got the treatment they deserved. Anybody who is an individualist can't be socialistic unless he's cracked. I didn't believe even then that people who were ignorant and filthy and malicious were delightful and I still don't. Most of them could have got out of that world if they'd been worth anything. Some of them did. But I had to live among them just the same and the only way I could bear it was to keep telling myself, 'Some day I'll be rich and powerful and show them all what I can do.' I used to lie awake at night, sometimes on an empty stomach, planning how I should conquer the world and triumph in the faces of all those cousins and all the hunkies who used to bully me because I was the only one in the whole school who wasn't like them.

"And when I was fourteen an awful thing happened. An Irish bartender tried to throw my father out of a saloon by the railroad yards and my father who was drunk threw a bottle at him. It hit the man in the head and two days later he died. Because my father was drunk they only found him guilty of manslaughter and they sent him off to prison and took drink away from him and he died within a year. I never saw him again because my mother wouldn't let me see him in prison, but it all seems worse

to me now because I imagined all kinds of horrible things. If I'd known the truth it would have been better. After that there wasn't anything to do but to leave the town. So we went away to another town like it and my mother borrowed money and tried keeping a boarding house and when I was fifteen I went to work in the mills because I wanted to get money to begin my career."

He looked at her for the first time and smiled. "Do you mind awfully all this long story? Because I've got to finish it now I'm started. It's the first time I've ever told it and I think it'll do me good. It helps me to recapitulate. It's like drawing back and making a fresh start. Telling it puts things in order and gives me a new impetus.

"You see I got more than money out of those years of common laborer's work in the mills. I got an experience and a knowledge which has been worth hundreds of thousands of dollars to me since. I got to know the steel workers and the unions and how they thought and the kind of grievances they had. I was one of them and yet not one of them because with most of them the mills were the end and with me they were only the beginning. It was a kind of experience too that gave me a poise and a balance beyond value. Maybe you know the same thing—that feeling of being at ease wherever you find yourself because you know about all the layers that lie deep down underneath and know all kinds of life instead of just one kind. It gives you strength and a sense of values that people like Hector Champion never have.

"And I got out of it a heroic physique so that no amount of work ever tires me." He held out one arm and con-

tracted the biceps so that muscles strained the expensive cloth of his dinner jacket and suddenly Ruby had a swift picture of Fred Saunders doing the same thing in a moment of delight in his own physical perfection, and she thought, "Perhaps in the beginning David Melbourn was exactly like Fred. Perhaps they are only different because life treated them differently." And again she thought fantastically, "Perhaps if Fred had lived he would not have stayed always a sea captain. Perhaps he would have been rich and powerful like Melbourn." And fantastically the idea occurred to her that Melbourn might be Fred Saunders returning to her after thirteen years.

"I got those muscles there. They aren't quite respectable muscles in Hector Champion's world because they didn't come of rowing and polo and other pretty exercises, but they're powerful muscles all the same and one of them is worth all of Jim Towner's body."

He turned back again to the fire and said, "But all the time I was in the mills I was saving money and thinking about the day when I should have wealth and power, and I studied in the daytime when I was on the night shift and in the night when I was on the day shift. I went to night classes in business because it was in business and money that I saw my chance for power. It was to be a power built of mines and steel and coal and railroads. And when I was twenty, because I had a clear head and knew figures and knew the workers and all their cussedness, I was made assistant to one of the shed superintendents and began to make good money of which I managed to save

more than half. And that year two misfortunes happened to me. My mother died and I got married.

"It wasn't a marriage I wanted to make. I was never in love with the girl and certainly never wanted to marry her. She was a fairly pretty girl three years older than me with reddish hair and freckles, stupid and hysterical and she was the daughter of a respectable German grocer named Hostetter. Women haven't ever been a vice with me and she was the first woman I ever had. It never occurred to me whether it was moral or immoral because in the Mills living with a girl was just an everyday occurrence. Verna Hostetter claimed she was a virgin until I met her but I never believed her. She knew too much. In any case we began to take walks in the evening and go for buggy rides in her father's buggy and at the end of the summer her father came to me cursing me and threatening me and saying I'd ruined his flower of a daughter and that she was going to have a baby. If I didn't marry her, he'd shoot me or go to law about it.

"At the time it seemed the end of everything to me. I didn't want to be married to such a stupid nonentity as Verna Hostetter or be forced to spend my money keeping her. And I didn't want to give up an excellent job and run away without finding another. It was a panic year and there weren't jobs lying about everywhere. A lot of the men had been laid off at the Mills. I thought and thought and at last the only thing seemed to be to marry her and then get rid of her later on and maybe pay her money to keep out of the way. I ought to have run away flat but I was young then and my good job and the chances

of promotion were everything to me. So we got married and the baby was born dead and in my heart I was thankful. I didn't want Verna Hostetter to be the mother of my child and I couldn't really be sure that it was my child. I wanted a better wife than Verna and better children than she could ever give me and I didn't want children until I could give them all the things I'd never had myself. It would have been awful if the child had lived—awful for the child and awful for me because it would have tied me always to the Hostetter family. And I'd never looked on the affair in that way but only as an affair in which she was having as much fun as myself.

"So I decided that if Verna had any more children, they wouldn't be mine and I shut myself away from her and began to work harder than ever. She was silly and extravagant and spent all the money I was earning and even some of what I'd saved. I locked myself in at night to work and she used to come and beat on the door and make scenes and say the most dreadful things, trying to get me to live with her. It wasn't that she loved me. She was just a slut. Sometimes I wouldn't come home at all at night but stayed in the mill offices rather than come home. It went on like that for nearly three years. I was nearly twenty-six and I began to think that if that kind of life went on I'd simply end up as a super-mill clerk with no money and no power and only misery and unhappiness at home. And then a dreadful thing began to happen to me. I began to think that I must get rid of her somehow. I used to think about it at work during the day and at night when I lay awake discouraged and baf-

fled, and presently I began to think that perhaps I could murder her and no one would discover it and fix the guilt on me. The thought became more and more terrible until presently it didn't seem anything unusual. I began to think about it the way I thought about my accounts and began to plan in the most casual way how it was to be done. I thought of all sorts of poisonings and rejected them all and at last I thought I could strangle her and sink her body in the bottom of a deep quarry filled with water that was seven or eight miles from town. I was an excellent swimmer and I even planned how I could swim down under water and put the body on a ledge where they'd never find it if they dragged the place. And I'd say simply that she'd run off and that I didn't know where. It was all done in my mind. In my mind I was a murderer. But I was kept back thinking all the time how I could make myself certain of escaping justice, because if they shut me up in prison or hanged me then my ambition was finished forever.

"And then a wonderful thing happened. She came to me one night and said she wanted to leave me and marry a middle-aged banker in the town. For a long time I suspected something had been going on because she wasn't the kind of woman who could live without a man. They wanted to get married right away and they wanted us to be divorced as soon as possible. If either of them had been clever they'd have guessed that a divorce was the one thing I wanted most in the world. At first out of mere cussedness I pretended that I'd fight a divorce and then she said the banker would pay me money to let her di-

vorce me. You see in a quarrel she'd already told me that they'd been living together. She said they'd be willing to pay me five thousand dollars. I guessed then that she was having a baby and I knew of course that it wasn't my child, and they didn't want a scandal on account of his position in the town. So at first I pretended I couldn't consider such a thing and after a day or two they said they'd pay me ten thousand. So I said I'd think it over.

"You see I'd heard about the franchise of a street railway being for sale in a town called Adrianville not far away and I wanted the money to buy in on the bigger part of it because I thought I could make a real beginning in that way. So at last after a month had passed and there wasn't any doubt that she was having a baby, and things were growing worse and worse for them, I said I'd leave town the next day and never bother them again if they'd pay me twenty-five thousand dollars.

"That sounds pretty awful, doesn't it? But it really wasn't. It would have been awful if I'd ever been in love with her or if any of them had been a decent sort. But the whole lot—Verna and her lover and her parents—were mean and small minded and had used me for reasons of their own. They'd have done much worse things if the chance had arisen. And they'd damaged me far more than the value of the twenty-five thousand. And you have to remember that with the life I'd led I was pretty hard and full of ambition and bitterness at a girl who had spoiled all my plans and wasted the money I'd saved. So I took the chance to have it all back a couple of times over.

"They paid me the twenty-five thousand and with it I bought the better part of the franchise and a bank went the rest of the way. What we did with it mightn't be considered the purest means of exploitation to-day but it was all right then because everybody did such things. And it was a beginning. I made more money and bought in on an interurban electric line and reorganized it and that too succeeded and before long the banks began to see that I was a smart fellow and of use to them. And it went on from that and in the end the twenty-five thousand has become millions and millions. The war came along and in the war everything happened at a terrific speed and my money doubled and tripled, and suddenly I found that I had all the power and wealth I'd dreamed about, only I had it years sooner than I'd ever expected.

"In the beginning I didn't have time for anything but making money and more money but after a while there came a time when I began to think about other things and to see that money wasn't everything, especially when you had so much of it that making more really didn't matter. I'd never had a decent education because there was never any time for it. All I knew was what I'd picked up here and there reading when I had a chance. It was a woman who got me started on things like pictures and books and music. She's dead now. She was a charming woman. I'd have married her if it had been possible but she was already married and she was a Catholic, so there wasn't anything to do. She took me in hand when I was a hard successful man and did her best to make something decent of me. It was from her time that I began to be

civilized and able to hold my own in any world. Since then I've kept it all up because it interested me and I liked it.

"In my life I've had five mistresses beginning with Verna Hostetter. Three of them were charming women. Verna was not and the last was not. You can guess who she is. I've seen you watching us. I know you must have guessed. I've been trying to end it for a long time but it only came to an end to-night, quite suddenly, after Hector's dinner. It's really been finished for a long time—almost since the beginning. I just drifted into it in the first place. It wasn't anything I wanted very much. I was bored and looking for distraction. That's what I can't go on doing. Some people can drift and like it—people like old Hector and Jim Towner. I suppose they've never done anything else. But with me it's different. It makes me feel insane. You see I've always had something to drive for and lately it's all seemed to have disappeared in thin smoke. No matter how much more money I make I'll never be any richer than I am now because wealth is really only measurable by what you can buy with it of freedom and independence. The power interests me but not the money."

He leaned forward, holding the whiskey glass between his knees and Ruby felt that he wasn't talking to her any longer, but to himself, as if he were alone in the room.

"I can't stop altogether and pretend to be interested in polo and things I'm not interested in. That isn't enough. Besides I'm a young man, really. I'm only forty-seven. I'm not even tired. I'll go on working over things like this Gobi mine deal with Elsmore because that's fascinating—

to feel that your money is reaching out, controlling land and wealth and even people and governments on the other side of the world. But even that isn't as exciting to me as those first ventures back in Ohio. I want something else now, and what I want is a part of the fantastic dreams I had as a boy. Sometimes I think that all our lives are determined and planned out before we're grown men and women and that no matter how we try the things we really want are always the things we wanted as children. I think we have to go on carrying out dreams no matter how tired we become."

He looked at her suddenly. "Did you ever think of that? We *are* creatures of fate, the best of us, but it isn't as blind a fate as we like to think. We do what our bodies make us do and what our pasts dictate to us and the older we grow the more everything we do is determined by what the past has made of us. We can't escape the past in our lives any more than we can in our faces."

He put down the whiskey glass and, sitting on the edge of the chair, leaned over and took both her hands in his.

"I want you to marry me not only because I'm in love with you but because I am sure you are the one person in the world to be my wife. I want you to help me build up what I want the future to be. I suspect that it's the same kind of future you want yourself." His face flushed and he released her hands and turned away again as if he couldn't look at her and say what he had to say. "You see, I want to have children, and when I die I want them to be fixed in the world. Some people would say that by doing that for them, I was spoiling their chances for

a rich life, and maybe I am, but I've had the rich life and I don't want them to have it. I'd feel that I had really succeeded if I could pass on to them as realities all the things which were dreams to me in my childhood. I've never had a real friend of my own, some one who grew up with me from childhood, with whom I could share my confidences. I've never known intimacy. I've never really talked to any one. It's just the shell that does the talking. I had to be like that. I never had a chance to have friends until it was too late and I found friendship difficult and even impossible, because my world has always been changing. It's never stayed fixed and still and it's only in lives like that that friendships can flourish. I've always been growing up and out away from people I knew, becoming more and more rich and successful and learning more and more about the world, while they stood still, content and fixed in a solid world that didn't change. I was always discovering that just when I was on the borders of friendship with a man, everything had changed and I was suddenly drawn out of his world and away from him. It's only lately that my life has begun to settle and become a solid thing. I'd have liked friends. The whole thing has been a lonely grisly business sometimes. I didn't want to leave them behind, but it always happened that way. There's nothing to be done about it. I'd like my children to know what security is and the friendships that endure forever, and the feeling of a house and perhaps land that belonged to their father and belongs to them and will belong to their children. In a way

it would make up to me for what my father and mother and I myself suffered.

"You see I've got to marry some one who understands all this. I don't want a wife who doesn't understand what I've been through myself and who takes all the things I want for granted because she was born with them. With a wife like that there would never be any understanding, no matter how much I loved her in the beginning. We'd always be moving along side by side in separate grooves, never together. I could never even tell her the things I've been telling you because she wouldn't understand them and she'd only think them unimportant. Again it would be a matter of the past. We'd always be strangers really. She'd never understand that to make my life complete the way a painter makes a picture complete—I'd have to have splendid houses and beautiful pictures and entertain distinguished people and perhaps have a finger in politics and know the whole world, not just New York but London and Paris and the whole world. She'd never understand that I meant to be the *founder* of a line rather than just some one who carried it on."

He turned toward her again and said softly, "I don't suppose that you thought before that I was quite human. Most people don't think so. It's only that the kind of life I've had has made me crush everything deep down inside myself. I've had to be secretive in the beginning because it saved my pride and because it was a protection, and then it got to be a habit. What I've said to you to-night has been a relief to me, an agony too, but at the same

time a relief. I've said things I thought I could never say to any one. I couldn't have said them to you if I'd only been in love with you in a physical way. It's much more than being in love with you. I've watched you. I've talked to you. I've seen you in all sorts of circumstances and always you've seemed to me perfect, just as you were tonight when Fanny was making a fool of herself. The more I've seen, the more certain I was that I had found at last the woman I wanted to marry. I couldn't have said any of these things when I was younger but I can now. I know a little the value of things."

He grinned suddenly, a sheepish, boyish grin and she was aware again of the queer indefinable charm that sprang from vitality and a kind of cynical humor. "This was a queer kind of proposal but I didn't want it to be otherwise. I didn't think when I came that I could go through all that I meant to tell you, but I have and I think I was able to because you helped me. You know the worst things I've done. And now I can offer you all the things I've talked of and I can offer you absolute devotion and fidelity, because I'm not the sort of man who goes fluttering about from one woman to another. I've gotten mixed up now and then but only for want of something better. I can't bear cheap women. That sort of thing doesn't interest me. And I can offer you love too because every time I see you you become more beautiful and more desirable."

He stood up abruptly facing the fire with his tall figure outlined against the night-blue of the window. The powerful shoulders drooped a little. Suddenly without looking at her he said, "I'll never speak of any of this

again, not even if you married me and we lived together for a thousand years."

"But I want you to talk about it, David, whenever you feel like it."

He turned quickly and looked at her, and seeing suddenly that what she said meant that she would be his wife, he grinned again.

She didn't speak, but she was aware that all the impulse toward shallow coquetry, which had led her to stage his entrance, had now disappeared completely. She was ashamed of herself and she thought, "I should be a fool to refuse him, even if I did not love him."

She suspected that perhaps she did love him and she knew that all the doubts had been melting away while she sat listening. They had melted away before the sound of his voice and the sight of his face, now flushed and excited, now cold and tired, changing quickly as if shadows were playing across it. She saw that he was not as cold as she had thought, nor as hard, and that perhaps he was even capable of great tenderness, and, oddly enough, she pitied him.

Beside his life her own seemed no more than a series of chances in which she played the rôle of a cheap opportunist. But strangest of all it seemed to her as she watched him that there were many things about him which were like Fred Saunders—the boyish eagerness and vitality which had a way of welling up suddenly from beneath all the coldness and self-confidence, the way he flushed when he spoke of things that were not easy to speak of and even the way he stood now with his legs apart and his

hands clasped behind his back, swaying a little on his toes. It was in a way as if Fred had not died but had gone away and came back now after thirteen years hardened and older and a little tired. For a second she was afraid again because her luck seemed too good.

She tried to speak but at first no words came because she could not think what words she must use, and at last she said, "It's all right, David, I'll marry you." She stood up and, looking at the floor, she said, "If you'll put up with me. Sometimes I'm cheap and trivial and vain, but I'll try to be decent. I'll do my best."

"You're better than you think," he said suddenly. "Most decent people are."

Then he put his arms about her and she turned, confused and dizzy and uncertain whether it was David Melbourn or Fred Saunders who embraced her and whose lips were kissing hers. She thought wildly, "It's not true. My luck is too good." And she wished suddenly that her father could know how happy she was and how successful and in the next moment she was not certain of the wish, for although he might be glad that she was happy he might not be glad that she was so worldly.

He kissed her again and then shivering as if he were cold, he said, "I must go now. We have to be more careful than most. There will be a lot of people wishing us harm."

She knew what he meant and she thought quickly of poor Fanny Towner who would hate her always and wish her evil. Fanny wouldn't be her only enemy. There would be all the other women who had wanted him for himself and his power and his money.

She heard the little clock on the mantelpiece striking three. Melbourn kissed her good-night and she went with him to the elevator and stood there till he stepped in and was swept downward into the storm.

When she returned to the living-room she sat for a time looking into the fire and then took a drink from his glass, although she disliked whiskey, because it was his glass, and thought how she had changed in a brief hour, losing all her hardness and the air of sham which the city she loved had imposed upon her. She had become human again. She wasn't any longer Ruby Wintringham. She was Ruby Saunders who had loved a sailor. And then she was afraid, thinking that perhaps she had been hypnotized and that when she wakened to-morrow she would find that she herself was unchanged, that David wouldn't be David but Melbourn, rather cold and distant and secretive. She remembered what he had said about escaping the past.

And then she felt suddenly cheery again and remembered that something in his long story had not been completed. For a time she tried to think what it was and then suddenly it came to her. He had not told her what had become of Verna Hostetter. She would ask him to-morrow.

CHAPTER X

IT wasn't Rosie's first experience with a drunk. Before she was twenty-two she had learned all the tricks of managing a man heavier than herself who was heavy with the heaviness of intoxication, and because drunken-

ness was a spectacle to which she was accustomed it held no terrors for her but only a kind of boredom. When men got like Jim Wilson, they became nuisances. Even Melbourn, watching her idly, without knowing who she was, steer Jim across the sidewalk before the house where she lived was aware of her skill and filled with admiration.

It was a respectable old brownstone house built by a lawyer of the Seventies to house his respectable family, but after his death the estate had turned it for greater profit into two flats with a shop in the basement. It was a discreet house for there was no doorman and no janitor and the shop on the basement floor was always closed by seven. On the second floor lived a rich invalid who spent most of his time in Florida or California, and so there was no one to suspect Rosie's free-and-easy manner of living, no one to remark the rather strange people who came and went, no one to discover that her "friend Mr. Wilson" was really Mr. James Haven Towner, and no one to complain when things happened like Tony's smashing all her furniture to bits.

Propping the half-conscious Jim against the wall by the letter boxes she managed with one hand to turn the key in the lock of the outer door and to switch on the light. When she had got him safely inside and had made certain that the lock had clicked shut (for she was still afraid that Tony might return to kill them both) she managed to put the body before her and to push it slowly up the stairs. It was a difficult process for he seemed suddenly jointless, and kept slipping back, and it was all complicated by her fear that he might suddenly pitch sidewise

and fall into the gaping well of the old-fashioned staircase. It was no good telling him to help her because he didn't understand anything she said and had long ago lost all control of his muscles.

It took her more than half an hour to get him up the two flights. At the top she again propped him against the wall and with one hand turned the key in the lock of the green painted door. As she opened it he fell inside on the floor of the little vestibule, softly, like a man made of rubber, and lay there, insensible. She closed and locked the door and, leaving him on the floor where he could come to no harm, she switched on the lights. They were all capped with little shades made of rose pink silk and gave the place a queer look of tawdry gaiety like the inside of a cheap night club. The vestibule was planned to open into the sitting-room of the flat, but because Rosie had found the bed-room too small for her tastes, she had reversed the rôles of the two rooms so that now one entered the bed-room directly from the little hall.

The whole room was done in pale pink and blue satin taffeta and trimmed with a great deal of gold lace. There was an enormous bed which stood on a little platform with a table beside it supporting a telephone concealed by a doll clad in an elaborate costume of pale pink and blue and lace. There was also a bottle of whiskey and a syphon. The curtains at the windows which looked out over St. Bart's churchyard toward the house of Savina Jerrold were of pink taffeta. On one of them there was a great stain of brown where some one had spilled a glass of whiskey.

In this room Rosie took off her mink coat and went at

once to the table where she poured herself a drink before going into the room which she always called "the parlor" to make a place ready for Jim to sleep. She had thought out her plan as she drove through the storm in the taxi-cab. She could put Jim to bed in the parlor and lock him in there and then if Tony had lied to her and still had the keys and returned, Jim at least would be safe from him until she could scream and summon help.

Rosie's idea of elegance concentrated itself entirely upon Italian antiques and as she switched on the lights in the parlor there sprang from the darkness an indescribable clutter of heavy furniture carved in the overexcited Italian fashion and designed in their originals for a room at least fifty times the size and the height of Rosie's parlor. On the walls hung bits of brocade in which acid had played the rôle of age, and at one end there was a large religious picture of dubious history showing "The Raising of Lazarus" and painted with the melodramatic lighting of Carlo Dolci. Vestments of heavily embroidered brocade which had once been worn by priests in their holy offices, adorned the backs of chairs and covered the piano where Rosie sat when practising the songs she sang at Rosa's Place.

At one end of the room there was a divan, also covered by a vestment embroidered in purple and gold, and heaped with pillows of a dozen colors and shapes all embroidered and trimmed with black and gold lace. Going over to this Rosie took up the priest's robe and hung it over the back of one of the medieval chairs and when she had done this she piled the pillows at one end and then went to fetch Jim.

She found him still lying on the floor of the vestibule. He was sleeping soundly by now and she had great trouble in waking him. At last, half dragging, half lifting him, she got him into the parlor and on to the divan where he lay sprawled with one arm hanging over the side and a silly grin on his face. She took off his collar and removed the emerald studs from his shirt front, laying them on top of the piano. Then she dragged his overcoat from him and threw it over him and went to fetch from her bedroom a quilt of pink satin trimmed with lace and embroidered with pale blue flowers. It was made for a large double bed and she was able to tuck it in about him so that he would not grow cold during the night, but in spite of anything she could do the feet kept sticking out, exposing grotesquely the patent leather boots. After trying again and again to cover them, she gave up at last and, taking off the boots, covered the silk-clad feet with her mink coat.

Then so that his head might not be too bad to-morrow, she went to the window and opened it a little way, just enough to admit fresh air but not enough to allow the snow to blow in. At the window she stood for a moment looking out into the churchyard when the snow blew wildly round and round the quadrangle enclosed by brownstone houses, all dark at this hour of the morning. The fresh air made her feel a little better and when she had breathed deeply for a time, she returned to the divan and stood looking down at the unconscious Jim, filled with no sense of repulsion but with a sense of pity that a man so good-looking and possessed of so fine a physique should

have fallen into such a state of dissolution. It always made her feel a little sick to see a fine man destroying himself with liquor. Lying there unconscious and relaxed, the mouth sagged like the mouth of an imbecile. Under the eyes little dark pouches stood out and under the chin there was a roll of fat. She thought that Tony, who couldn't be much younger, had a body still as hard and wiry as it had been at twenty, despite all his dissipation and drug taking; and the thought of Tony suddenly filled her with a longing and a desire for him so strong that she forgot for an instant even her fear. Tony was her sort. He wasn't a gentleman, kind and considerate even when he was drunk like Jim. She couldn't ever really love Jim because there wasn't anything exciting about him. And again she told herself sharply that it was all finished with Tony, and that it wasn't any use trying to bring back the past and pretend that he'd ever again be like the Tony who'd got her into trouble.

With a sigh she turned, switched off the lights and went into the bed-room, where she threw herself down in the big chair upholstered in black satin and poured herself another drink. As she raised the glass to her lips she thought, "My God, how tired I am! Everything's a mess. Why in Hell do I go on?" And suddenly she saw that the only thing which kept her going on was Tony and that in spite of everything the thing that she kept hoping for was that he would come back to her. She wanted him now, even if he came back to kill her. She saw suddenly that if some one came and told her he was dead, she wouldn't care any longer about living, and she knew

that some day some one would come and tell her that or she would read it in the newspapers. They'd shoot him in the back or take him for a ride and then one day somebody would find his handsome body all decayed in the river and that would be the end of all his fire and passion and wickedness. And it would be the end of her because she wouldn't care any longer about anything.

She thought, "Why don't I just take a big glass of veronal and call it a day?" But she couldn't do that because if she did the old man wouldn't have any money and he'd be sent off to the poorhouse on Blackwell's Island where no Healy had ever been and Tim wouldn't have any one to keep him out of jail; and Pat, who was the salt of the earth, needed her because Esther was going to have a baby and having a baby meant lots of spending and Pat didn't have any money because he'd always been so free and openhanded with everybody. Pat ought to have kids. "He's the only decent one of us," she thought.

She took another drink and then feeling a little better she got up and tried to take off the soiled white satin dress. It was all crumpled and one seam was torn down the side from her exertions with Jim, and when she tried to pull it over her head it became caught, imprisoning both her arms. In a fit of temper she ripped it into two pieces and threw it on the floor. Then slowly she took off her stockings, and then her combination until at last she stood quite naked in the rosy glow of the lights, staring at the reflection of her body carried back and forth and multiplied many times by the mirror in the bath-room door and the mirror of the dressing-table.

It was a superb body, firm and white, with a skin that was like the petals of a camellia and the sight of it and the warmth of the whiskey she had drunk made her feel better. Without clothes she felt that she was able to breathe again without difficulty. For a long time she studied the reflection in the mirror, regarding the body with detachment as if it did not belong to her at all. It seemed to her for an instant that she herself, Rosie Healy, had nothing to do with this body but was merely imprisoned in it and that it was the cause of all her troubles and all her despair. If she could get free of this body, she could escape from Tony and whiskey and things like that. But she thought suddenly with a burst of pride, "You've got a real figure, Rosie . . . none of those slab-sided skinny things you see in the night clubs." And she turned this way and that, examining all her curves with satisfaction, searching for traces of sagging muscles or rolls of fat. But there were none. It was a magnificent body, firm and white, with long thighs and high firm breasts, marred only by the tiny pink scar on her side made by the bullet that time when she had tried to kill herself. Perhaps with her health and vitality, it would be good for another five or six years, and after that—if she lived that long—it wouldn't matter much.

At last she sat down again in the black satin chair, and admiring in the mirror the look of her white flesh against the black satin, she poured another glass of whiskey and in the midst of the act, she halted abruptly with the whiskey bottle poised in her hand, listening, for she fancied that she heard the sound of a closing door; but the sound of the

wind whirling round and round St. Bart's churchyard drowned and blurred all other sounds so that she couldn't be certain whether the thing she heard was a reality or only something born of her terror of Tony. Still listening she went quickly to the door that led into the room where Jim was sleeping and, turning the key in the lock, she took it out and went to the dressing-table where she thrust it deep into a pot of cold cream, taking care to smooth over the surface of the cream so that there wouldn't be any trace of what she had hidden there. She turned again and listened and this time she fancied that she heard footsteps coming up the stairs, slowly, and uncertainly.

The sound was more distinct now and in a moment she heard the stairs creaking beneath the weight of the unknown feet. She thought, "It's only the tenant below coming home unexpectedly."

She went to the closet and took down a peignoir of pink satin trimmed with marabout feathers and wrapped it around her and listened again. This time there was no doubt. The footsteps were outside the door. There was even the sound of metal scratching against metal as some one fumbled with the key to find the lock. She thought wildly what a fool she had been not to have had the lock changed before now. The key turned. She knew then that it was Tony coming back to kill her.

2

But at the sound of the key the old desire returned to her body and she thought again how strange it was that she had no control over this body which went on wanting

Tony in spite of all she could do. Leaning against the foot of the bed she waited, feeling confused and sick from terror and desire. The handle of the door turned slowly and the door opened and into the little vestibule came the figure of Tony. She thought, "I've tricked him before and I can do it again. He mustn't know that Jim's here."

From somewhere he had gotten a shabby overcoat in the two hours since she had seen him. He wore the same stained greasy cap with the peak pulled so far over his face that she could not see his eyes. There was snow on the cap and on his shoulders. He closed the door behind him and stood for a moment in silence looking at her.

Then as if his return was the most casual thing in the world she turned and took up her whiskey glass. She said, "Well, you lied to me again, didn't you? You had the keys all the time."

She let the peignoir slip down off her white shoulder, thinking that if she could transform his desire for vengeance into a desire for her body, she would be able to save herself and Jim. But she knew all the time that when he was like this, with his nerves all on edge from wanting drugs, she couldn't wheedle him in that way.

He came into the room a little way, looking about him as if he were dazed and did not know how he had come there. She said, "I suppose you've got hold of another gat. I suppose you've come to kill me like the dirty coward you are." She tried to be brutal to him but there was a part of her which she could not command.

He didn't take off his cap or his overcoat. He looked at her and said, "I want some money."

"Coke?"

"I want some money. I didn't come here to get you. It's him I'm after."

"He ain't here. He was so drunk I sent him home."

In the pink light she could see his eyes now and she saw that they were bloodshot and dilated and that he was beyond the point where she could wheedle him. It was not Tony who was staring at her but some strange animal. She waited while he opened the doors of the bath-room and the closet, searching for Jim, thinking that perhaps after all he didn't have a gun because he would have shown it before now. With fascination she saw him go over to the door of the parlor, turn the knob and try to enter. She saw him thrust his wiry shoulder against it and saw the door hold firm. She kept thinking that if only Jim wasn't too drunk to move she could tell him to escape by the window on to the roof of the floor below. But Jim couldn't walk across the floor let alone climb out of a window.

Tony tried the door again and then turned to her.

"Where's the key?"

"I dunno. Minerva lost it."

"You're lyin' to me to save that—"

She screamed at him. "I tell you he ain't here."

"If you don't give me that key I'll take a chair and smash down the door."

"If you touch that door, I'll open the window and scream and the cops'll put you where you won't bother me any more."

"Nobody'd hear you to-night."

She moved back a little and opened the window a little way. The cold air blew in a little gust of snow, and all at once she had a strange vision of herself which was like a nightmare in which she was alone in a city filled with millions of people who could not hear her if she screamed. They were sleeping and eating and walking the streets but none of them made any effort to save her. They didn't seem to know that she was there.

"Look here, Tony. Don't our life together mean anything to you?"

She stepped a little to one side toward the doll-covered telephone, thinking that if she could only knock it from the table some one would hear her screams and send help; but he was too quick for her. He seized her by both wrists, sending the glass and the whiskey flying across the room. When he had her fast, he cried out, "It's a helluva life, ain't it? I can't stand it any more."

The touch of his hands filled her again with desire. She thought, "He means to kill me and I want to live." Aloud she said, "I tell you I don't know where the key is."

She tried again to knock over the table on which the telephone was standing, but he struck her on the side of the face, knocking her on to the bed. She screamed, a single terrifying scream, and then the dark wiry hands throttled the sound, sinking into the flesh of her throat. She fought him wildly, striking out with her naked feet, trying to bite him and scratching his face again and again with her long, red, varnished nails. But it was no good. He was tearing her throat apart and she could not breathe. His cap fell off and rolled to the floor and his black curly hair fell over his face, which was all bloody and torn from

her scratches. She thought, "I'm dying. It's all over." She couldn't breathe and all at once a voice said, "Why not die? Why not let him kill you?" And she ceased fighting him. She felt his body pressed against hers and a burning flame seemed to envelop them both, melting them together into one. She knew that it was Tony she loved and that there had never been but one lover who was Tony. And their love was wicked and accursed.

Her body arched itself into a sudden spasm of terror and desire, a dark fog filled the room, blurring out the pink lights. She tried to call out to him, and the next moment was only a body which lay limp and still.

3

For a long time he went on shaking the body and worrying it in a madness which would not see that the body no longer fought him, and then all at once he let go of the white throat and, kneeling on the bed, he looked down at it peering through his black hair. Then he said softly, "Don't go on pretendin'. Gimme the key." And when the body made no answer, he shook it again violently in a return of the rage which seemed suddenly to have softened and flowed from him. Again he shook it and again, crying out, "Lay off pretendin'. You can't put that over on me." But there wasn't any answer and at last he remained quite still, kneeling on the big bed looking down at it.

And then all at once he went suddenly frightened and felt sick, thinking, "She ain't dead. It ain't so easy to kill a woman like Rosie." And he seized the whiskey bottle and tried to pour the stuff into her mouth, but it only ran

out again making a thin brown stream against the white skin. He threw the bottle to the floor and, bending over her, began to say over and over again, "It's me, Rosie, Tony. It's me. Don't go on foolin' me. It's me, your Tony. You ain't dead, Rosie. Tell me you ain't dead. I didn't mean to hurt you, honest to Gawd." And all the while the chill fear kept growing.

And when he got no answer he began suddenly to cry hysterically and flung himself on the floor where he knelt and began to pray in a strange gibberish mixture of Italian and English. He beat his head on the floor and against the table, knocking it over and the doll and telephone with it. He seized his thick black hair in both hands and began to tear at it, crying out, "It ain't true. It ain't true. You ain't dead, Rosie. You ain't dead." And then for a long time he lay face down on the floor, sobbing.

It was the sound of the telephone which roused him. It wasn't ringing but was buzzing and buzzing with the sound it made when a receiver was left off the hook and as he became aware of the sound he was filled with cold horror. He couldn't remember when it had been knocked to the floor and he thought that some one listening at the other end of the wire had heard her scream and would send some one to arrest him. He fell back into the black satin chair and lay there watching the body, waiting, hoping that somebody would come and finish him.

4

Slowly and after a long time the desire to escape and to live began to return to him and with it the wild hunger

for drugs. Without looking at the body he reached over and touched it and his hand touched one of the white breasts. He drew away as if the touch had burned him, for on the breast which had always been warm and soft there was a chill now, like the chill of marble. Slowly he got up off the bed and, kneeling beside it, prayed for a long time for her soul. When he had finished he went to the bath-room and washed the blood from his torn face and pushed his hair back from his eyes. He was like a man hypnotized who did these things without consciousness of action. He kept thinking, "I can't stand it. I've got to get some snow some place."

Then he went to the bed and laid the body flat and crossed the hands that had begun to stiffen, and wrapped the pink satin peignoir trimmed with marabout feathers about it to hide its nakedness, and at last he covered it carefully with a blanket, thrusting in the edges as if the poor body might still feel the cold of the winter night. When he had finished he prayed again and then without looking behind him went quickly out the door of the little vestibule, closing it behind him, leaving the rosy pink lights still casting a glow over the body, in marabout and pink satin, reflected back and forth endlessly between the two mirrors.

5

Outside the light had begun to turn rosy and gray and he ran westward through streets that were deserted and empty, always toward the river front because that was the district he knew best. At Thirty-fourth Street and Ninth

Avenue he saw the figure of a policeman silhouetted against the lights of a cheap restaurant and his heart was filled with a terror that he had never before known for policemen. Slipping into a doorway he waited until the figure vanished inside, and as he stepped out he reached up to pull the cap down over his eyes, but there was no cap and he remembered suddenly with horror that it was lying on the floor beside the bed where Rosie lay dead. Plunging westward toward the river his nerve went back on him and he saw himself already dead, caught and cornered and trapped and dead with a current burning his body. He saw himself jumping in the chair while a score of men stood about watching him being killed. That cap and the telephone would trap him, and people like Tim and Jake, knowing he was living with her, and people like the bouncer at Rosa's Place, knowing he'd been there to see her. And when they found her they'd find that cake-eater of a lover in the flat too and they'd know he couldn't have done it because he was too drunk.

He ducked in at the doorway of Jake's Place, had a drink and borrowed a cap and as soon as he'd borrowed it he knew he'd made another link in the chain that kept wrapping itself about him and would bring him to a place where they'd kill him in spite of anything he could do.

In the street he hurried on until he came to a building of yellow brick much discolored by the smoke of the engines on Death Avenue. It had a sign on the front. Valparaiso Hotel. Here he dodged into the doorway and ran up to a gray unheated room overlooking the expanse of cobblestones where in the flying snow horses and drays

had already begun to work carting barrels and crates from the big ships that lay tied to the wharves beyond. There wasn't any one in sight, not even that hag Mrs. Dacklehorst, who was always up at the crack of dawn.

Without taking off his coat, he climbed into the bed and pulled the soiled blankets over his head but they couldn't keep him from seeing her, lying stiff and dead in the glow of the rosy lights. He didn't even remember "Lucky Sam" Lipschitz he'd shot six hours earlier. He could only see Rosie. That was different. It made a coward of him. He could never go back to her again. There wasn't any Rosie now. She was dead. He could never go back to her again and be taken in. There wasn't another woman like Rosie. And he'd killed her.

Presently he began to rave and cry.

CHAPTER XI

WHEN Soames, the valet, had gone away, leaving old Hector alone in the hall with the note dropped by Mrs. Wintringham, he went into his bed-room where Soames had already laid out his dressing-gown of purple and silver and his slippers of red morocco. It was a small, pleasant room, less stuffed with treasures than the rest of the house, with walls painted peach-color and curtains of imported chintz at the windows. There was a large and elaborate dressing-table with a triple mirror lighted from above and an old Spanish bed which stood on a platform. The head of the bed was much higher

than the foot and on it was painted a design of cupids entwined with garlands of pomegranates, lilies and roses. There was something warm and glowing and almost feminine about the room which made Hector's absurd body seem all the more grotesque. It smelled faintly of eau de cologne and lavender water.

As he waddled into the room, closing the door behind him, he noticed suddenly that he was still carrying in his hand the note Melbourn had written Mrs. Wintringham. He read it again and then in a sudden fit of irritation tore it into bits and threw it into the fire. His pink soft finger was no longer bleeding. He removed the handkerchief from the wound and threw it on the floor so that Soames, who had a penurious nature and tried to save on laundry bills, would be certain to send it off. Then he began indolently to relieve his body of the stiff encasing clothes which he had worn all the evening with so much weariness. He stood before the warm fire, turning away from the mirror so that he would not have to see his own grotesque body. Half dressed in his drawers and singlet he had the appearance of a comic figure in a movie, and naked he was a figure out of some gross lithograph by Felicien Rops. He hated his own body with the hatred which he felt for all ugly things. He could run away from ugliness, he could fill his house and surround himself with the most perfect treasures, but his own body was always with him like a curse from which there was no escape, and so he hated it more than any ugliness he had ever known.

It descended from his chin in rolls of white fat to a

white fat belly that was the price of liking the table too well, and there was something white and smooth and hairless and repulsive about it, like the body of a grub found nestling in the rottenness of a damp log.

He did not turn toward the mirror until he had encased himself in pyjamas of pale yellow crêpe de Chine and on top of this placed the purple and silver dressing-gown. Then he was able to risk looking at himself, but when he did look, he saw that he remained grotesque in spite of everything, a mass of gorgeous color and material from which peeped a soft, round, eunuch face with cold pale blue eyes.

The single glance plunged him again into the depths of bitterness. Why, he asked himself, had he of all people in the world been cursed with such a body and such a face? To most men it did not matter whether they were handsome or ugly. Philip lived on quite unaware that he was beautiful both in body and in face. An ugly body would not have mattered to Philip, who did not care very much whether he was surrounded by beauty or by things that were drab and commonplace. And Jim Towner, who was just an animal, had another sort of good looks, and that fellow Melbourn who was really ugly had a certain magnificence about both his figure and face. There were times when his face and bearing made Jim and even young Philip seem plain and nondescript.

And another regret followed all the others which had been tormenting him since dinner. It was a regret that he had not when he was young taken care of his body and built it up the way young men did nowadays so that

when he was old it could not have fallen to pieces. It had never been much of a body, for the shoulders always sloped away like the shoulders of a bottle and the hips were too wide and the knees knocked against each other, but it might have been kept firm and hard instead of turning into this soft and shapeless envelope of fat. He saw again, bitterly, that he had wasted all his youth in collecting the precious things which cluttered up his flat and which, as soon as he was dead, would be scattered again as if no one had ever cherished them or had the taste to bring them together. Suddenly he hated them all—the pictures and carpets, jades and crystals and tapestries—and was filled with a desire to cast them all out of the window into the storm, as if by doing so he could cleanse the flat and all his life and begin afresh.

His bitterness was all the more profound because he saw that after all he had never had any choice in his way of living. It had been dictated to him by his own body and its weaknesses, by the upbringing he had had and his mother's neurotic fear that something might happen to him so that he would not grow to maturity and be able to carry on the Champion name. And because she had always protected and coddled him and never allowed him to live like other children, but always kept him tied close to her side, he'd grown up shy and timid and afraid of all women but her and of all men until he met Patrick Dantry. He saw now that he had loved Patrick Dantry because he was beautiful and all that he himself had wanted, wistfully and without knowing it, to be. It was as if he had sought to grow and spread and live

through Patrick Dantry. And then he had lost him to Mary and afterward to Nancy because Patrick Dantry wasn't afraid of women and so to him the love and friendship of another man was as nothing.

Suddenly he felt an astonishing wave of hatred for his own mother, and in its intensity he saw her again with an extraordinary clearness, pale and beautiful and fragile, suffering always from ill-health so that he was bound always to do what she desired; but for the first time he saw her, completely, a selfish and evil woman who had ruined all his life. Philip who had never had a mother was much happier. Philip was able to live. No one had gotten in his way.

Even that belief in her goodness and beauty which he had cherished a lifetime was not true but only a deception.

And he thought, "If I had had character I could have broken away from her. I could have changed my whole life. There was a time when it could have been done if I'd only known it. And I could have changed everything if I'd married Savina when she wanted me to marry her. Savina would have carried me through. Any one tied to Savina would be certain to live." But when he remembered how she had frightened him that day in the orchard he knew that marriage with her would have been impossible. She would have needed stronger stuff than himself.

He lay down on the chaise longue staring blankly at the lights on his dressing-table, which he did not see at all because he was seeing now only things which were in his memory. He thought how, after all, he had been

avenged on his mother, because the very reason for her treatment of him had been defeated. She had wanted him to grow to manhood, to marry and carry on the precious Champion name, and by guarding him so that nothing could ever happen to him she had robbed him of the power of carrying on that name. He had gone on through life with nothing happening to him until now it was too late. He was withered and finished and the Champion name was dead and the only Champion was named Dantry for a father who cared so little for the Champion name that he had dragged it through the dirt of scandal.

He saw suddenly that Nancy was right. No matter how bad her life had been. No matter if she had run off with Patrick Dantry. No matter how many lovers she had known, she was right. What people said did not matter in the end. Her life had been a better life than his. For no reason at all he remembered something which had happened more than twenty years ago. It was in Paris in a salon and in a corner by the fire there were three people seated. One was himself. One was a pretty woman whose name he did not remember and the third was an old woman dressed a little in the old-fashioned way of the Second Empire. She had beautiful white hair and a withered wrinkled face and on one of her fingers were so many narrow bands of gold that they covered the first knuckle. They were, people said, souvenirs of her lovers. He heard her saying, "Ma chère, lorsqu'on est vieux, ce n'est plus les choses que nous avons faites qui fait nos regrets mais les choses que nous n'avons pas faites . . ."

2

There was a faint knock at the door and Hector started up suddenly and called, "Come in!"

It was Soames with a lemon and a knife on a silver tray. He put the tray on the dressing-table and went silently into the dressing-room to return in a moment with a towel and a bowl of hot water which he placed beside the silver tray. Then he turned and said, "Is that all, sir?"

"That's all."

But Soames lingered unaccountably, looking at him anxiously until Hector cried out again in irritation: "There's nothing the matter with me. Go to bed."

As the tall, narrow, black back of Soames went through the door he thought bitterly, "Even Soames has lived more than I. He had a son who was killed in the war. Even that is better than having none at all. He had a wife who died of cancer, but even that is better than having none at all."

And that made him think again that to-morrow he would certainly be told that he was dying and that he had but a few months to live. To-morrow they would have the X-ray pictures of his stomach. He could see his stomach at work, moving, digesting, in a kind of cinema they had taken of it. He could watch the thing that was killing him at work. Suddenly he hated his body more than ever, this horrible, fat, unhealthy body from which he could not escape, and to which he—the spark, the thing that was Hector Champion—was chained. When it decayed he, too, would decay and cease to be.

Painfully he rose and seated himself at the dressing-table and, automatically, by long force of habit, he began to cut the lemon into thin slices and, laying them on the surface of the towel soaked in hot water, to apply them to his face. It was thus that he had preserved the soft white skin that seemed so repulsive in so old a man, a skin that was too young for the body and the bald head fringed with white hair.

When he had held the towel to his face for a long time, he wiped his face dry and, opening a jar of cream, began to apply it and then suddenly he halted and, staring at himself in the mirror, thought, "Why do I go on doing this? What difference does it make when I am dying?" Taking up the towel he wiped the cream from his face and, lying down again on the chaise longue, he took up a book and tried to read, but his mind would not follow the words. It was a novel called "Burnished Autumn," written by a precious young man, a mere boy, who was one of the season's literary discoveries and who had dined at his house two nights ago. It was much praised for its style, and style was a thing which Hector cherished above all else in writing. He collected books for their style as he collected jade and crystal necklaces. He saw that this boy had a style of his own and that he wrote with a liking for strange and precious words, but somehow there was nothing behind the style. It was, he thought, like a veneer of carving pasted upon the outside of wood rather than a carving that descended into the wood itself. To-night pretty garlands and arrangements of empty words weren't enough. His mind kept piercing through them, going on to other

things, thinking about the past and following those people who had dined with him a little while before and had now gone down into the city. He kept imagining fantastic and lascivious things about them, wondering whether Melbourn was spending the night with Fanny or with that delicate and beautiful woman, Mrs. Wintringham, and whether Philip had won what he wanted from that actress whom he himself had never seen and somehow could not imagine save as a vague embodiment of all grasping and deceptive women, and whether Jim Towner was indulging his vulgar uproarious animalism with that night club singer. In the end it all came to that. That was the beginning of everything and death was the end.

At last his restlessness became so great that he threw "Burnished Autumn" on the floor and, rising, began to walk up and down the room, his red morocco slippers clap-clapping against the faded and priceless Aubusson carpet. Then he noticed by the clock that it was twenty minutes past three and Philip hadn't come in yet and he thought with bitterness and a strange excitement, "He's not coming in at all. It wouldn't matter to him if I died to-night here alone. He's lying with that strumpet and that's all he wants." And it struck him suddenly that it did not matter to any one in the world if he should die to-night because he was finished and useless but it did matter that Philip who was young and healthy should have what he wanted.

He pushed aside the curtain and looked out into the storm. Through the blowing snow, the lights of Fifty-ninth Street cut a straight line westward to the North

River, and above Broadway there was a rosy yellow glow out of which rose one tower after another, splendid and gray-black and blurred by the snow. It was a magnificent and beautiful sight but it had for him no reality. It was like something dreamed which was beyond the power of puny man to create, and suddenly he hated it without knowing why, because he had no part in it and because to him it was a strange city, adventurous, hostile and barbaric in which there was no place for the old. It was a city which belonged to young men like Philip and to strong men like Melbourn.

While he stood there a motor appeared dimly out of the snow, coming westward from Fifth Avenue. It careened a little from side to side, pushing its way through the drifts and then turned sharply and drew up by the curb. Through the blowing snow he could not see distinctly but it appeared to him that three men got out of the motor dragging after them a bundle which they threw into a deep drift that filled the areaway of a house opposite. Then quickly and furtively they climbed in again and the motor drove off northward along Avenue A and lost itself in the storm.

It was nothing. It had no significance. But it filled him with a curious sense of foreboding as if death had passed by him in a motor and driven off again into the storm.

He put out the lights and taking off the purple and silver dressing-gown got his fat body laboriously between the scented sheets. He tried to sleep but it was impossible because he kept thinking of Philip and that actress, baffled

and tormented by that bitter feeling of frustration which had been with him always.

CHAPTER XII

AT two o'clock Patrick Healy went off duty as doorman of splendid and expensive Berkshire House. Turning up his collar about his plump throat, he set out into the blizzard, battling his way westward to the subway station at Fifty-ninth Street and Lexington Avenue. Near Fifty-eighth Street a trolley car, empty and dark and abandoned stood caught by a great drift of snow and a little farther on there was an automobile half buried in a drift near a fire plug. The blizzard made no difference to the subway. Nevertheless, he was forced to wait twenty minutes for his train and when it came it was empty. He knew the crew of the train, almost all of them, and he chose the car operated by his friend Eisenberg because he felt in friendly mood. At this hour Eisenberg did not mind his smoking in the train and even shared a cigarette with him. They shouted at each other above the roar of the train except when it pulled into a station. Then Eisenberg had to get up and fling open the automatic doors with a great clatter which appeared to delight him. But no one got on. There was nobody wandering about on a night like this.

"Some night!" shouted Eisenberg, who was a heavy man with a stolid face blue-black at the jowls with the thickness of his beard.

"Some night!" shouted back Pat.

"They ain't seen nothing like this in twenty-five years."

"Not in sixty, I guess."

They kept shouting at each other out of pure friendliness, because neither of them had anything to say, and presently Eisenberg took a tabloid newspaper out of his pocket and shouted, "Yuh want it?"

"Yeah."

Pat opened it and began to look at the pictures and the headlines. He didn't read much. In these papers there was just enough reading to suit him. You got all the dope without having to wear your eyes out reading a lot of stuff that didn't have anything to do with it. He looked at the photograph of a gunman, freshly killed that day, and of a woman called Pilts who was going to be tried for sticking a breadknife into her husband while he was asleep. He thought she was pretty good-looking and pointed out her good points to Eisenberg.

"Some day," shouted Eisenberg, "they're gonna convict wunna these dames."

"Yeah. Some day."

They both laughed.

He looked at the photograph of a woman who had pretty legs exposed above the knee. Underneath he read, "West Orange society leader sues hubby for divorce, naming eight women." Just below there was a picture of two automobiles entangled and charred and in the corner the picture of a fat middle-aged Jewish lady. She was killed in the accident which took place opposite Grant's Tomb. On page three there was a photograph of a prohi-

bition congressman who was going to be tried for attempting tc smuggle in whiskey from Havana, and a photograph of a pair of Siamese twins, one of whom had expressed her intention of getting married. Pat and Eisenberg looked at this and grinned at each other.

And then Pat turned to a section called "Lonely Hearts," which was a kind of correspondence club, and began to read the letters. He had a softness for this section because it was through "Lonely Hearts" that he had met Esther. A year ago, just for fun, he'd written a letter saying he was lonely and would like to meet a nice girl, plump and jolly. He did it on a bet, thinking maybe he'd just get another adventure out of it, and then Esther turned up and he got himself married just when he thought he wasn't the marrying kind. While he read he grinned to himself without knowing that he was grinning, because he was thinking how it had turned out to be a good piece of luck and how he'd got the best wife in the world, hard-working, but always out for a good time, money-saving, cute as Hell and full of love for him, and now he was going to have kids of his own, at any moment.

He read:

I am a cultured young girl forced to work for a living. I live alone with my mother and would like to meet a young man interested in books and the moving picture stars. I should like him to be serious-minded but not too much so. Though I am a quiet girl, I like a good time now and then, but not too often because I believe that life is serious and important.

(Signed) Elsie.

"Not for me," thought Pat, and Eisenberg, slamming the doors, shouted at him, "Here's where yuh get off. Was yuh planning to spend the night in the train?"

Pat jumped up. "I was readin' and I forgot." As he went out the door, he waved the paper at Eisenberg and shouted, "There's a helluva lot goes on in this little berg in one day."

The door slammed shut and the train pulled out. Pat, buttoning his collar, went towards the steps. The wind was howling through the gratings and in the booth the ticket man had gone to sleep. On a night like this there wouldn't even be anybody about to stick him up.

2

Outside through the blowing snow the great mass of the car barns, hollow inside and lighted like a cavern with green and red and blue and yellow lights, loomed directly in the path of the homeward-bound Pat. They spoke to him, saying, "Here is a place which has not yet gone to sleep and which never goes to sleep. In the little room at the back of the barn there is a group of good fellows sitting by the stove playing pinochle. There is hot coffee and maybe a drink of something stronger." And because Pat was one of those who never liked going to bed, he was tempted.

On the corner he leaned against the front of the delicatessen store, gazing at the car barns and telling himself that on a night like this a fellow had a right to stop and get a drink on his way home. It was a long way to the little two-family house where Esther was waiting for him, but

then after all Esther would be asleep. She only wakened when she heard his key turning in the lock. Then she rose and heated his supper for him. He wasn't disturbing her rest by stopping a minute with the boys. After all she'd be asleep.

So, having convinced himself that he had a right to a drink and that he wouldn't harm any one, not even Esther, by stopping just for a minute, he crossed the tracks and entered the mouth of the great illuminated cavern.

The place was full of trolley cars driven in by the storm. They were covered with snow and ice.

In the little room at the back he found his friends—one or two men from the neighborhood, two conductors and a motorman off duty, Hennessey, the night watchman and Hennessey's cousin who had come all the way from Jersey City for a night with the boys. They hailed him with shouts because he was a fellow who was always welcome anywhere, and in an instant he had his coat off and was sitting at the table with a big cup of steaming coffee in front of him. To-night was a big night. Instead of pinochle, they had a stud game.

"I can't stay late," he said, "but gimme a coupla stacks of chips." He lighted a cigarette and his honest blue eyes began to shine. He drank his coffee, thinking what a good bunch the boys were and how warm it was in the little room with the wind howling across the open marshes up against the shaking sides of the car barn; but his eyes kept following the greasy cards that were being dealt out by Hennessey, the night watchman. Round the table they went, six of them in order, face down. He didn't look at

his until his third card, believing that if he looked it brought him bad luck. Then came a round face up. He had a four showing. Against him there was an ace, two queens, a ten and a nine. Hennessey, who had the ace, bet and he followed. On the third round Hennessey flipped a five beside his four. Then for the first time he noticed the color. The four and the five were both spades. His heart began to beat and he looked stealthily at the card that was face down underneath. It was a six of spades!

Hennessey himself had two aces showing and bet heavily and Pat had to follow, he told himself, with the beginnings of a straight flush. Berman, one of the conductors, dropped but the others kept on. Another round and Pat's heart leapt into his throat. Before him, beside the other cards, lay a black eight of spades. He felt the blood rushing into his face. The others took notice of him for the first time, looking at his cards suspiciously and then at his face. Hennessey bet again and he followed. The fellow from Jersey City had two queens showing and one of the motormen, namer Mergenthaler, had the beginnings of a straight.

Hennessey began dealing, slowly. Pat felt his heart was like to burst. Only one card in the pack could do it, one little black seven of spades. He began to swear under his breath with excitement. Hennessey gave the man from Jersey City a ten, so that he had two pairs showing. Then he gave Mergenthaler a black seven and Pat came near to heart failure when he saw it coming, but it was the seven of clubs and didn't matter. Then slowly, tantalizingly, Hennessey turned over the seven of spades and paused, examining Pat's face and whistling slowly. Pat, with a thrill

running up his spine, merely grinned, a grin which might mean anything. Slowly Hennessey turned his own card. It was another ace. He had three showing.

The others crowded round. Hennessey thought a moment, and then bet the limit.

"Four aces, have yeh?" asked Pat and appeared to give himself over to deep thought. Then slowly he pushed out the bet and enough more to raise it the limit. The man from Jersey City with his full house died quickly in disgust, and this time Hennessey looked at Pat and slowly put in the raise. Then he said, "Well, I don't believe yeh," and raised him the limit. Then Pat collapsed. He covered the raise and didn't raise again because he liked Hennessey. If it had been Mergenthaler he'd have gone on raising forever.

He said nothing. He merely turned over the six of spades.

Hennessey said, "Well, I'll be damned if I ever seen such a thing before at stud," and slapped down his cards in disgust.

They all had to have a drink to celebrate the hand.

3

It was the straight flush that caught him. He had honestly meant to go home early but he couldn't go after that. He couldn't do anything but sit there watching the turn of the cards, round after round, his heart throbbing with excitement. He went on winning and winning. He had some more drinks and suddenly before he knew it, it was four-thirty. He looked at the clock and felt ashamed of

himself and said, "Boys, I can play another hour and then I gotta go."

At the same moment the door opened and Izzy Rothstein came in. Izzy was a solid muscular little Jew who lived in the other side of the two-family house which Pat occupied. He lived with his mother, a widow, and his grandmother who came to America when she was sixty years old and was now nearly a hundred. He drove a truck by day for a storage warehouse in Corona.

At first he didn't see Pat and addressed Hennessey, saying, "Kin I use yer telephone? I gotta get a doctor quick."

At the sound of his voice and the word doctor, Pat turned and they recognized each other. Izzy was excited. He cried out, "It's fer you wife. She's gonna have de bebby at enny minute. Git along home. I'll git de doctor."

Wildly Pat gathered up his overcoat and told Hennessey to keep his winnings for him. Izzy was already at the telephone calling a number. He turned to Pat.

"She esking fer yuh. She's all right. De old vimmin are vit her. De old gramma vas a midvife."

4

He ran through the snow, turning at last into Primrose Place and bending low to break the wind that swept off the river and the marshes hurling the half frozen snow into his face. He cursed himself and asked God and the Virgin Mary to bear witness that never again would he stop at the car barns and never again would he play poker. In some places the drifts were so deep that he couldn't run but had to plod through the heavy snow, and at last he came

in sight of the little house, exactly like fifty other little houses on each side of it. He knew it at once because it was the only one with a light in the window. At sight of it he was suddenly seized by the terror that when he entered he would find her dead and that it would be his fault for having stopped at the car barns instead of going straight home. He had been a bad husband, but his shame was lost in his fright.

As he climbed the steps panting, he heard a groan and thought, "She is dying and it is my fault! I have killed her!" The door was unlocked and he pushed it open, entering the tiny hall. The whole house consisted only of a bed-room, a sitting-room, a kitchen and a kind of alcove off it which served as a dining-room. Through the open door of the hall he saw into the kitchen, where the immensely old figure of Grandma Kochitz was pottering about before the stove. Again he heard a groan and he pushed open the door prepared to find Esther dying.

She was there but she did not appear to be dying. She was walking up and down the room and she looked at him with an expression in which there was no evidence of pain but of a great deal of irritation. She said sharply, "You're a nice one, you are. Hangin' around the car barns while I'm sufferin'."

There was something familiar about this speech which made him feel suddenly sheepish but comfortable. He had been prepared for a death scene and he only received a familiar scolding. He tried to think of something to say. He had meant to ask forgiveness on his knees but he now saw that such a scene would only appear funny, espe-

cially in front of Mrs. Rothstein, Izzy's mother, who seemed to have accepted the whole situation and was seated calmly hemming a diaper.

He could only mutter, "How did I know it was for tonight? How was I to know?"

He had never been quite so much in the wrong before. Esther continued to walk up and down. He took off his coat sheepishly and hung it in the hall. He thought she looked very pretty and because he was ashamed of himself he loved her more than ever, but at the same time he was relieved that she wasn't dying, and that made him feel a little more cocky.

"Are yuh sufferin' much?" he asked.

"I'm sufferin' all right. It comes and it goes . . ."

Mrs. Rothstein looked up from the diaper with that air of triumph which women find in childbirth as a common experience that draws them all together and makes them in a way superior to men.

"No man vood bear it like she's bearing it."

Pat saw that it was one of those statements which no man could ever answer, so he was silent.

"Ah," sighed Mrs. Rothstein, "if you men knew vat it vass you vouldn't be so free and easy wit your luffmakin'."

Pat seated himself on a chair, sitting very straight and feeling awkward and useless.

Esther continued to walk up and down and every now and then she would stop, grasp the end of the bed for a moment, groan and then resume her walking. The look on her face made him feel faint.

Mrs. Rothstein took up another diaper and said, "Vat did Izzy say about de doctor?"

"He's gonna bring him. Mebbe I'd better go and hurry 'em."

"There aind't no hurry. Izzy'll bring him. You can count on my Izzy. You yust stay here vare you're needed. There aind't nuttin to vorry about vit Gramma Kochitz here. She's helped out all her life. She knows de tricks."

Just then Gramma Kochitz came in out of the kitchen. She was so old and so stooped that she was bent nearly double and she had tiny, beady, black eyes filled with the fire of life even though she was nearly a hundred. She had got up in the middle of the night and put on her clothes carelessly. Her skirt dragged open at the rear and over her nightgown she had thrown a black knitted shawl. Her scheitel, made of reddish brown hair, without which no man but her husband had ever seen her, was put on crooked so that the strands of her thin white hair straggled out over one eye. She took no notice of Pat. He might have been simply another piece of furniture.

"You better sit down, Gramma," said Mrs. Rothstein, "and don' git yourself too exzited." Then in an aside spoken loudly as if the old woman wasn't there at all, she added, "It's exzites her. She aind't had anything like this for years . . . not since Manny's vife had her tvins."

The old woman went over to Esther and put her hand on her stomach and then began to mutter to herself. Pat, watching her, wondered if it was a spell she was saying. He was beginning to think it was a slow business. He'd never thought about it before but he'd always supposed it

was a painful business but much quicker than this. He got up and went into the kitchen for a glass of water and when he returned he found that old Gramma Kochitz was telling a long story in a kind of gibberish made up of Yiddish and broken English. Pat sat down again, listening to her and following with his blue eyes the figure of Esther as she walked up and down. He knew a little Yiddish and somehow the story Gramma Kochitz was telling penetrated to him more as an impression than as a connected story. The old woman got immensely excited and her old voice squeaked.

It was a story that had to do with the birth of somebody or other and it had happened a long time ago in the old country in a place called Rosenkrantz which Mrs. Rothstein, in an aside, said was Poland. It was on a terrible night like this and some drunken Russian soldiers tried to carry off a good Jewish girl, the daughter of Cantor Rosenberg, and there was a fight and they managed to save the Jewish girl but the soldiers went away and came back with a lot more soldiers and set fire to the Ghetto and began shooting down Jews . . . men, women and children. In Grandma's house—she was a young woman then, put in Mrs. Rothstein—there were two cellars, one under the other, and the Rabbi brought a lot of women and children to hide there. He took them down to the lower cellar and when they were all inside, he closed the trap door and piled boxes and barrels on it and then went away and left them. All night the shooting and stabbing and ravishing went on while the women and children huddled together in the lower cellar. And then in the middle of the night the

Cantor's older daughter who was going to have a baby began to have labor pains and she, Grandma, was the only one who knew about birthing children so she had to take charge. The birth took most of the night and half the next day but she managed it somehow and the baby and the mother both lived, but nobody came to open the cellar until the evening and by that time the air was so bad that the mother had died. When they came out of the cellar they found the synagogue and half the Ghetto burned and in the houses were lying the bodies of all their friends and their fathers and brothers and cousins and among them the body of the Rabbi who had hidden them.

Before she could finish the story the old woman began to wail at the memory of the pogrom and Mrs. Rothstein had to finish it.

"It was my husband's—my Abie's—fadder dat was born like dat. He grew up and married Gramma's daughter Sadie who vass born two veeks later."

The old woman continued to wail and Pat saw that Esther's pains were coming more often now and he wanted to cry out. He wanted to tell the old woman to shut up her yelling. He wanted to do anything desperate to help Esther, but before he could think of anything to do there was a sound of a motor in the street and then two or three explosions like pistol shots as the motor backfired. He listened. It wasn't a doctor's closed motor that was making such a noise. It was an enormous truck, roaring and sputtering and backfiring. He listened again and then the door opened suddenly and the doctor came in followed by Izzy. They were both covered with snow. It had turned

their faces scarlet and still clung to their eyelashes and caps and hair.

The old woman stopped her wailing and the doctor, a short, plump little man, said cheerfully, "Well, well, everything seems to be going well."

Pat shook his hand in silence and looked at Izzy to explain the mystery of the truck.

Izzy grinned. "The doctor's auto couldn't get tru de snow so I vent to de varehouse and got one of the moving vans."

Mrs. Rothstein put down her diaper and beamed. "You kent git by my Izzy. He's a smart boy. He'll git on in de vorld."

5

The wind died down and toward morning the snow ceased to fall and the slow winter dawn came at last, revealing the full dreariness of Primrose Street, a narrow, treeless, open space between two rows of dwellings one after another exactly alike with a monotony heightened to the edge of insanity by a whiteness that covered everything, wiping out all color but the uniform sickly yellow of the houses. The whiteness swept in waves and hollows across street and sidewalk, piled upon doorsteps and porches, unbroken and smooth as if the street were a thoroughfare in a mad city inhabited by ghosts who left no footprints. Even the tracks of the motor van which Izzy had long since driven back to the garage, were swept away.

At six-thirty the door of Number Twelve opened and Simon Hirshkovitz set out, shivering, to make a solitary track through the snow to his stationery shop on New

York Avenue. At seven-ten the door of Number Nineteen opened and Patrick Hallowell, fat and fifty-five and a fancy plasterer, set out for Jersey City to finish a job in the new ferry-house waiting-room. He crossed the street gingerly and followed the tracks of Hirshkovitz, stepping carefully into the holes made by Hirshkovitz's flat feet through the deep snow. At seven-twenty-five Hennessey, the night watchman at the car barns, lumbered into the street from the opposite direction. As he passed Pat Healy's house he looked in, tempted to stop and ask for news, and then thought better of it and went on his way. At seven-thirty more doors opened at Number Thirty-six, Twenty-seven and Nineteen, and a little later more and more doors until there were as many as half a dozen people in sight at one time struggling down the street through the snow, bound, all of them, for the city whose distant towers shown brilliant and white through the smoke and haze of a glittering winter morning, until at last there was a path beaten through the snow on the side of the street where Patrick Hallowell and all the others had followed primitively the footprints of Simon Hirshkovitz. The sun glittered on the snow and little gusts of wind, as if strayed and left behind by the blizzard, swept round the little houses, whirling the snow in little glittering uprising spirals. The milk wagon, snow-bound and late, blundered a path through the middle of the street, the horse steaming beneath a cover of frozen canvas.

At nine o'clock the door of Pat Healy's house opened and Mrs. Rothstein, holding her skirts high and exposing her fat black-stockinged legs, came out, descended the steps,

and gingerly picked her way to her own door. She was going to get Izzy's breakfast and Grandma Kochitz remained behind until the faithful Izzy fetched the nurse. Rosie Dugan, Pat's sister, who was in the show business, was going to pay for the nurse.

A little while later the doctor came out, holding his little black bag and turning to say to Pat, who stood shivering in the doorway, "She's all right now. Just let her be quiet. I'll hurry the nurse along."

6

It was all over and the baby was born and in the big double bed in the tiny bed-room Esther was lying white and still. All the pain and the crying, from which Pat could not escape in the tiny house, was finished now and she looked very pretty and plump, although her face was colorless and her short red hair was damp and clung close to her head. She had forgotten about Pat playing poker at the car barn and she was thinking wearily how funny it was that a year ago she was wearing out her feet in Macy's basement, handing out kitchen utensils to screaming women, and now she was lying in a pretty house of her own with a handsome, good-natured husband and this funny little thing by her side. Pat, sitting bolt upright on a stiff chair, kept looking at her without saying anything. He'd grin at her and she would smile back. He was trying to apologize to her for everything he'd done . . . for that night he came home drunk from the football game at Celtic Park and the night he kept her waiting two hours in front of the Palladium Motion Pic-

ture House and for all the nights he hadn't been able to pass the lights of the car barns and especially last night when he'd gambled against the chance the baby wasn't coming so soon. But most of all he was trying to apologize to her for having caused her so much pain, because after the night he'd put in, he felt as if it was all his fault and that nature had nothing to do with it. He was saying that he'd never make her have another baby and he'd never let her have another even if she wanted it.

And Esther, looking at him, understood that he was trying to tell her all this and smiling at him she tried to tell him that it was all right and that she forgave him everything, but in the deepest part of her she knew that he'd do it all over again just the same when he'd forgotten about last night and felt full of love for everybody again, and she knew too that she loved him because he was like that and would be weak enough to commit all his sins over again in spite of himself.

Pat went over timidly and sat on the edge of the bed with great caution, as if Esther and the baby were both so fragile that the mere presence of his big clumsy body might shatter them both. With one finger he pulled down the bed-clothes and looked at the top of the fuzzy red head and again there returned to him that same feeling he had had before the baby was born, only a hundred times stronger now. He had accomplished a marvelous miracle. He, Pat Healy, had begotten this child that was like no other child in the world. He was superior to every other man he knew. And again he thought how funny it felt to be a father, especially after so many years of being a

bachelor. His blue eyes shone and his big good-looking face contracted into a sheepish grin.

He looked at Esther and said, "She's purty, ain't she? I'll bet there never was such a healthy baby."

Esther said in a faint voice, "Gramma Kochitz is cookin' you some breakfast. We can't do nothin' good enough for her and the Rothsteins after last night."

They sat in silence for a time and then Esther said in a whisper, "When you get your breakfast you otta go down to the car barn and telephone Rosie. She'll be wantin' to know, the first one."

Then Grandma Kochitz came in and told him his breakfast was ready and he went and fetched it and put it on the bureau where he could eat and still watch Esther and the baby, and Grandma Kochitz pulled up a rocking-chair into the doorway and sat watching as if she thought he wasn't any use to anybody and if anything happened to Esther he'd just let her die because he wouldn't have sense enough to call anybody. But the old lady went promptly into a doze. Her scheitel slipped further over her face and her eyes closed, but she did not relax. She sat miraculously upright in so comical a position that Esther smiled and silently nodded her head for Pat to look at the old woman.

7

At ten the nurse came bustling in, looking starched and fresh and red-cheeked from the cold. Due to the good housekeeping of Esther and the help of Grandma Kochitz and Mrs. Rothstein, she found the house spotless and in order. Reluctantly Grandma Kochitz went home to get

some sleep and when she had gone, the nurse told Pat he had better go too and let Esther try to get some sleep. Nothing was as good as complete quiet. She drove him from the room but he came back again and peeped round the corner of the door at Esther and the baby as if he needed to see them again to believe that what had happened was true, and Esther, feeling him there, opened her eyes and smiled again and then said in a low voice, "I've been thinkin' about her name, Pat. I want to call her after Rosie. She's been so good to us. We can't do enough for Rosie."

He grinned and said, "Sure. Rosie'll be pleased."

The nurse heard him and gently but firmly closed the door in his face. He turned away and went out to put on his coat and hat to go and telephone Rosie and as he turned to open the door he saw Bill Kennedy, the policeman who had Primrose Street on his beat, coming up the walk. He opened the door and said, "Hello, Bill."

Patrolman Kennedy said, "Hello," but he didn't grin in response to Pat's grin.

"We got a new little Healy," he said, grinning and wondering why Bill Kennedy was so grim. "She arrived last night."

Kennedy came up the steps. "That's fine," he said. "Sure. I congratulate you. You'll be after needin' good news."

Pat looked at him, wondering if the old man had died or if Tim was in jail again. He said, "Why? Why'll I be needin' good news?"

"I got bad news for you."

"Yeah. What is it? Tim again?"

"No. It ain't Tim this time. It's Rosie."

"What's the matter?"

"She's dead." Pat stared at him and Kennedy said, "Somebody killed her. They only found her an hour ago. They want you down at the station. Thought you might have some dope that would give 'em a line on who done it."

Pat leaned against the rail of the porch, feeling sick. "Rosie," he repeated dully. "Rosie . . . Why'd any one wanta kill Rosie? She never done anybody any harm."

"I dunno," said Kennedy, "but it's seldom the wicked that gets killed." He took hold of Pat's hand with a queer gentleness. "Sorry," he said, and then, "She was a good girl, wasn't she?"

"She was the only good one in the family." And then he pulled himself together with a great effort and tried to ask Kennedy sensible questions. He was dimly aware that he was walking down the street through the snow, but he wanted to curse and blaspheme. He said again, "Rosie . . . Why'd any one wanta kill Rosie? She never done anybody any harm."

As they passed the car barn he said, "Can you wait a minute? There's something I got to do here."

"Sure."

Then suddenly he couldn't remember what the errand was and he stood stupidly trying to force his brain to work, and at last he remembered. Esther wanted him to call up Rosie and tell her the news.

"Come on," he said dully, "I'll do it on the way home."

CHAPTER XIII

WHEN Melbourn said quietly, "Yes, I think that's true," and Fanny slammed the door in his face and ran up the stairs she did not know what she was doing. She wanted only to run somewhere, anywhere, and, flinging herself down, to beat her head against the floor in a blind desire to hurt her body so that she might annihilate the rage and desperation of her spirit. In thirty-eight years she had never controlled herself and now, when for the first time in her life she was really hurt, she became simply a mad woman.

She did not even hear the crashing sound of metal and glass made by the slamming door, but it attracted the maid who had been waiting up for her and as Fanny reached the top of the stairs Maggie was there too, coming to investigate the cause of a clatter which echoed through all the house. At sight of her Fanny screamed, "Go away! Go to bed! I don't want you!" And when Maggie started to speak, Fanny screamed, "Shut up and go to bed! Can't you let me alone!" because for an instant Maggie had become to her Melbourn and Jim and Mrs. Wintringham and the world and all the things that had ever hurt and enraged her.

It was all as Melbourn had imagined it.

In her own room she flung herself down on the bed and, burying her head in the lace pillows, cried hysterically and dug her heels into the lace of the bedcover, ripping

and tearing it. She became like a spoiled child, baffled, furious, and with no outlet save physical violence.

2

It was a silly, frivolous room filled with pink taffeta and lace, with a Louis Quinze dressing-table and chairs and a chaise longue covered with lace pillows and a pink Iceland shawl. The lights had shades of the peach-pink color which throws the most becoming possible light upon ladies no longer in their first youth. But it was the bed-room of a young girl of eighteen rather than a woman of thirty-eight, and she hated it now because it was young and frivolous, and she hated the whole house and the whole city and every one she knew.

When the first outbreak of violence had worn itself out, she lay for a long time in a sensual coma, sobbing and thinking only of how cruelly she had been treated and that no woman had ever suffered as she was suffering; and when this mood was no longer of any interest, she lay clenching and unclenching her hands, digging the nails into the palms and reveling in her hatred of Melbourn. She believed that she was glad it was finished and told herself that she was punished thus for ever having taken up with such a common brute and adventurer, but in the same moment she knew that it was his very ruthlessness that fascinated her, and when she thought of him she felt sick at the knowledge that she would never see him again except distantly as some one passing on the opposite side of the street. Then she told herself that the break had only been a passing quarrel and that he would

telephone her or return to the house to make it up, and all the time she knew from the look in his eyes and from all that had happened for weeks past that it was finished forever, and that with a man like him when a thing was finished there was no turning back.

And suddenly she experienced the most terrible physical desire, more awful than any pain she had ever known. She wished that he would return and abuse her because that would be less terrible than the flat parting which made the whole affair seem cheap and trivial instead of passionate and romantic. But she knew that he would never touch her and that when he saw her again he would bow to her politely as if she had never been any more than a passing acquaintance.

As she felt more calm she grew ashamed, telling herself that a year ago she could never have abased herself in this way or had such depraved feelings; but she knew too that a year ago she could not have imagined such passion and desire and jealousy because then she had not been in love with him. It was only since he had been her lover that she, Fanny Towner, a lady and not a strumpet, had grown shameless and abandoned and miserable. She did not care any longer. She would do anything to have him back. Pride did not matter. She would walk the streets. She would give herself to any man who desired her. And then she experienced again the horror that had come to her as she sat with him in the motor. Was she getting to be like Savina's cousin Mildred who made advances to stewards and chauffeurs? She must be insane, she told herself. She must be evil and diseased.

She kept telling herself that it was Melbourn who had done this to her. It was he who had ruined her. He was responsible for her soul and now he had walked off and left her as if she had been the dirt under his feet. And presently she began, bit by bit, to live over the whole affair from the moment she had first met him and thought him attractive and an interesting man who would make her dinners more entertaining. She tried to convince herself that it was not she who had made the first advances, but she knew that she had in the beginning pursued him. She saw that at first she had not loved him any more than she loved Jim or any other man. It was not until after the first secret meeting that she began to suffer such agonies. In the beginning it was only curiosity and recklessness and boredom that had caught her. Suddenly she re-lived with a vicious intensity the whole afternoon that marked the beginning of their relations. She saw again the room and even the design of the wallpaper, and the hunting prints and the chintz curtains, and she lived again through the strange exciting emotion of ceasing to be a virtuous woman and of taking a first lover, and the memory of it made her feel faint.

She remembered with a vividness even more terrible his love-making and the discovery that until then she had never been loved at all and that all her life with Jim had been mechanical and banal and sordid, without passion or romance and on her side merely something which she endured with distaste. She remembered the strange exciting emotion compounded of jealousy and of perverse delight at the knowledge that he must have loved other women

before her and that she had profited by all they had given him.

After that day the thing had become an obsession. She could think of nothing but him. She could not endure it if he looked at another woman. She could not sit in the same room without watching him, although she knew it enraged him as nothing else could do. She gave herself over to an orgy of fleshly thoughts and dug her fingers into the lace of the pillow and wanted to laugh hysterically when she thought of the silly pale emotion she had once thought was love, and in the next moment she experienced a wild delight in the knowledge that in spite of all the suffering she had known something other women did not know. She saw suddenly that men had come to mean more to her than simple creatures upon whom she might practise her coquetry. She saw them in a new way, thinking of them wickedly as lovers. From now on, when an attractive man entered the room, she would always see him in a new way.

She felt suddenly that she could not go on living unless she had him back and she began to make wild plans to capture him once more. She would go to him on her knees, and then at once she knew that he would only hate her for such behavior and find a new contempt for her. She would write him letters promising to be gentle and humble and never again to watch him and to make scenes. She would tell him he might even have other women and she would not be jealous if only he would love her again. She even imagined herself going to his flat to hide herself

there, appearing as women did in the movies, to tempt him when he was alone in his bed-room.

But she knew that none of these things would be of any use. When he had turned away from her at the door she knew that he was thinking, "I'm through. I've had enough." She was even afraid that he had been waiting for such a chance, because for a long time now he had been different, preoccupied and bored, treating her as if she was silly and idiotic and wearied him. She began to cry again, pitying herself, and thinking, "Why must I suffer so? What have I done to deserve this? He is a selfish brute spoiled by all the women who run after him." And suddenly she hated all women and hated herself for being a woman.

3

The clock struck two and then three and slowly she knew that she had been right and that he would not telephone her nor return himself. He was probably sleeping quietly, or, worse, he was with that—Mrs. Wintringham. At the thought of this she became wild again, and when this mood had passed, she sat up on the bed exhausted and empty of all emotion and before she would see her own reflection in the tall mirrors, she powdered her nose and rouged her cheeks and lips.

Then slowly she began to undress, looking at her body in the mirror as she took off one piece of clothing after another, allowing them to lie where they fell, and as she looked at herself she thought, "I'm a slut. I'm a bad woman and there's no saving me now. I'll have a good

time and go to the devil. I've got a few more good years and having a good time is the only thing that matters. I am still pretty and I've got a good figure. I'll show him what he's done to me. Why should I care what people think? Having a good time is the only thing that matters. If only I'd discovered it sooner instead of wasting the best years of my life on a husband who is a lout." It was like being initiated into a mystery from which most women were excluded. "A woman is in love with her first lover," she thought. "After that she is in love with love."

She experienced a sudden triumphant delight in her own depravity and, looking at herself naked in the mirror, she thought, "This isn't Fanny Towner. This is some other woman. This isn't Fanny Towner who went to a convent where she wore an apron when she took a bath. It isn't the Fanny Towner who would never share a room with her own husband. It's some one else. And what does it matter? Fanny Towner didn't know anything about living or love." And then she thought suddenly how thankful she was that she was pretty and had a beautiful figure instead of being a woman like poor old Savina.

But she saw, too, that there were dark circles under her eyes and sharp lines at the corners of her mouth and she thought that now she was free of Melbourn she wouldn't suffer any more and look so old. Her mind slipped without reason to Nancy Carstairs who was now Lady Elsmore and was coming back from Europe after twenty-five years and she thought, "She was right. She's had love

all her life. It's love that keeps women looking beautiful and young. What difference does it make if she's had fifty lovers. She's probably stayed young and beautiful and charming. Nobody cares now what she did. She's lived and I've never lived until I met David Melbourn. But I'm going to live from now on. I'm going to be like Nancy Carstairs."

At last, overcome by a sudden weariness, she put on her nightclothes, and then did something she had never done before in all her life. Crossing the room she opened the door which led through the dressing-room into her husband's bed-room. The room was in darkness but she could hear no one breathing, and unable to leave without knowing whether he had come in, she switched on the light.

The room was empty and the bed was turned down but no one had slept in it. She stood for a time looking about her as if it were a strange room which she had never seen before. For the first time she seemed to be seeing the prints on the wall, the photographs of Jim's polo team and the bronze statuettes of his ponies Flying Cloud and Grassinet. The door of the closet stood open a little way and inside, in neat rows, stood his riding boots and his shoes and his slippers—numerous, expensive and masculine—and the sight of them gave her a faint feeling of excitement which she did not understand.

Quickly she switched off the light and, closing the door behind her, went back to her own room, thinking, "He's out with some woman. Well, I can't blame him, but I didn't think he had it in him." Her scorn of him seemed

to abate a little and he became almost desirable to her. It struck her as odd that she should think of him in that way when he hadn't even entered her room in more than seven years. Maybe from now on when Jim entered the room she would even think of him as a lover.

When she had put out the lights she opened the window a little way and placed the screen in front of it so that the light wouldn't penetrate the room and when she had done this she stood for a time looking out of the window into the yard behind the house. Far away, through the flying snow, she saw tower after tower rising up and up until their summits were lost in the storm. Here and there lozenges of light made irregular geometric patterns in the black and gray. She had looked out of the window a thousand times before and never seen these towers. It was the first time that they seemed to her beautiful.

The chill of the winter morning reached her and, slipping into bed beneath all the lace and crêpe de Chine, she began to pity herself again and to cry softly and presently, like a child, she fell into a profound sleep.

CHAPTER XIV

TOWARD morning, as the snow ceased to fall, the cold, stealing in the window from the churchyard of St. Bart's, wakened Jim Towner. It crept in about his body, filtering insidiously through the blanket and the overcoat and the pink satin quilt and Rosie's mink cape, chilling and sobering him a little. He wakened dully with

an aching head, not quite aware where he was or how he had come there; and the slow winter dawn, creeping in about the edges of the window shades, illumined the "parlor" so dimly that he did not at once recognize the familiar collection of brocades and grotesque furniture. Opening his eyes and shivering, he sat up on the edge of the divan and wrapped the pink satin quilt embroidered with baby blue flowers about his big shoulders. And then, slowly, he knew the room was Rosie's "parlor" and he knew that he had been completely drunk again and that he was still a little drunk. Slowly fragments of the evening before began to return to him. He remembered an awful dinner at Hector Champion's, and there was a memory of Fanny looking red and angry and unattractive and of Hector at the head of the table sneering at them all and Savina looking more than ever like a mountain in indignation. He remembered vaguely having encountered an old woman in the midst of a blizzard, and also a man carrying a mop and a bucket in which the water was bloody, and then the figure of Rosie in the white satin gown singing, "Diamond bracelets Woolworth doesn't sell, Baby." He remembered that she had left the table to speak to some one. But after that he couldn't remember anything, but he thought Rosie must have come back to the table because here he was in her parlor. It must have been Rosie who got him up all those stairs and covered him so carefully and opened the window a little so that he wouldn't feel so bad in the morning. Good old Rosie, he thought, you could count on her. She didn't leave you lying in a gutter and she didn't make terrible

scenes the way Fanny did. Then he remembered that he'd been thinking about giving up Rosie and saw at once that it was impossible. You couldn't give up a woman who treated you like that. It would be wicked. She was the salt of the earth. She made everything seem different.

Pressing his hands tight against his temples to ease the awful ache in his head, he wondered suddenly why Rosie had put him here in the parlor on the divan instead of taking him to bed with her the way she always did when he came in drunk, and he was suddenly afraid that she might be growing tired of him and didn't want him about. No, it couldn't be that. She wouldn't quit him when he needed her so badly. It couldn't be that because last night she'd been affectionate. She was the one who wanted him to come back here to the flat. Maybe it wasn't last night. Maybe it was another night. It all seemed so long ago, as if he'd been asleep for a hundred years.

He began to shiver again and pulled the pink satin quilt more closely about his shoulders and decided he'd go into the other room and get into bed with Rosie. That would make him feel warm again. And she'd talk to him and cheer him up and make him feel respectable and like a man again. He'd take something for his head and then they could both go to sleep and sleep until noon, and then have lunch right here in the flat.

He rose and, crossing the room, tried to open the door and when it did not yield he stood for a time staring at it stupidly and swearing. Again suspicion returned to him and dully he asked himself if she had locked the door because she had a man in the room with her. Did she

think he was so drunk he wouldn't waken? He told himself that no one could do so brazen a thing as that. Rosie wouldn't do it. She played square always. No, it couldn't be that.

He was aware again of the dull ache in his head and that he felt sick, and he fell to cursing himself for being a fool and getting drunk again when it always made him feel the same way next day. And last night he hadn't even had the fun of getting drunk with Rosie. He began to find excuses for himself and to tell himself that it was all Fanny's fault for behaving as she did in front of all those people at dinner on account of that Goddam bounder Melbourn. He leaned against the door and thought, "Why don't I let her get a divorce and have him and then she'd be happy and everybody'd be happy and I could marry Rosie and go off and live somewhere in Europe." It wasn't any use trying to patch things up with Fanny. When he thought about that, he was just kidding himself. But it was the kids you had to think of. They couldn't have a father married to a woman like Rosie. It wasn't fair to them. Things were bad enough for them as it was—Young Jim nearly sixteen and Elizabeth fourteen, just at an age when things like that made a Hell of difference to them. Why, it might ruin their whole lives.

He was overcome suddenly by shame and, sitting down on the arm of one of the horrible chairs, he began to weep drunkenly. Jim and Elizabeth were so young and healthy and he was such a rotter and Fanny such a fool. And in the midst of his blubbering he saw that there

was a streak of light under the door and Rosie must be awake because he knew she couldn't sleep if there was a ray of light in the room. Shivering he rose and knocked on the door calling out, "Rosie! Rosie!" He waited but nobody answered him and he knocked again calling out in a louder voice, "Rosie! Rosie! Let me in!" And again he waited and again nobody answered. And then, slowly, into his fuddled brain there crept the slow terror of a man without imagination. There was something wrong in the next room—something mysterious and awful which he couldn't picture and he had to get into the room before it was too late.

The pink satin quilt fell from his shoulders and was trampled underfoot. He tried the door again, shaking it violently, and when it did not give way he began to swear with a black unreasoning anger. Bending his head forward he thrust his bull-like shoulders against the door. It yielded a little and then sprang back and suddenly, in a burst of terror and blind rage, he drew back a little unsteadily and threw his whole weight against it again and again. There was a sound of splintering wood and the door gave way and he was in the room lying face down on the floor under the glow of the rosy lights.

For a moment he lay there dazed, with the pain in his head stabbing like a thousand needles, and then, pulling himself to his knees, he remained thus, his eyes all bloodshot, his mouth hanging open a little. He saw Rosie. She was lying on the bed in the rosy light, asleep, only she couldn't have been asleep or the noise he made breaking into the room would have wakened her. She lay

with her handsome body partly covered by a blanket and a wrapper of pink satin. Her hands were folded over her naked breasts and on one white arm glittered the rows of diamond bracelets. He kept telling himself that she couldn't be asleep or she would have pulled the bedclothes over her; and then he noticed her feet. There was something odd about the feet. They stuck up stiff and straight in the strangest fashion, and all at once he thought, "My God! She's dead! Rosie's dead! Oh, my God!" He began to jibber and mutter and suddenly was sick.

After a moment he said softly, "Rosie" and again, "Rosie," and when she did not move he dragged himself unsteadily to his feet and went over to the bed meaning to touch her and see whether she was dead or only unconscious. If the body was cold, she was dead. That was the way people knew. But when he got to the bed he couldn't touch her because the thought of touching the body he knew so well and finding it cold made him sick with horror. And while he stood looking down at her he thought suddenly how beautiful she was and that anybody so beautiful couldn't be dead because it wasn't right. Her eyes were open a little but they did not move and her white breast was quite still. She was dead all right. He didn't need to touch her to see that. Bending over her he saw a little row of red marks on her throat and slowly it dawned upon his muddled brain that some one had killed her. Somebody had killed her while he lay in the next room too drunk to help her. If he hadn't been drunk he could have broken down the door and saved her but he was too drunk. The room began to whirl round and

round his head and, stumbling and groping, he fell on the bed and began to cry, calling out, "Rosie! Rosie! Why didn't you scream? Why didn't you let me help you?" and then he began to curse. For a long time he was out of his senses and when he came to himself again he saw with horror that he wasn't lying beside Rosie but beside a dead body which wasn't Rosie at all, not the Rosie who sang and gave him a good time and got drunk with him. It was all over and all that would never happen again. Rosie was gone away some place leaving this body behind. Maybe if he could only make her hear she'd come back again and tell him it was all a joke. It couldn't be true because such things didn't happen. He began to talk to her as if she wasn't dead but was only pretending, and he kept telling himself that he was still drunk and this was a nightmare and that he had gone insane from drink.

Presently, he felt sick again and sitting down in the black satin chair he held his head in his hands staring at the bed, and for the first time since he was a little boy he knelt down and began to pray almost in the spot where Sicily Tony had prayed, only his prayer was different. He prayed not for her soul and for his own but that she should be made alive again and that he would waken from this nightmare. He didn't remember how to pray properly, so he just cried out to God, blubbering drunkenly in his terror at the spectacle of death.

2

It was the cold clean light of a brilliant morning, heightened and reflected by the snowy expanse of St. Bart's

churchyard, which roused him. It came in through the curtains of pink taffeta stained with whiskey, dimming the rosy glow of the lights in the room, and as he noticed it he became aware of a new horror. He was alone here in the room of a woman who had been murdered and if anybody found him there he, Jim Towner, would be arrested and accused. The horror of the thing sobered him a little and he felt suddenly a terrible calm, as if nothing more could happen to him. He saw the whiskey bottle on the floor beside the bed and, tilting it to his lips, he took a long drink and felt better. But the horror of being accused would not go away. He saw that he'd have to get out of the house without any one seeing him. He told himself that he must be calm and not lose his head. There wasn't anything he could do for Rosie. She was dead and he couldn't save her and he had to escape to save himself. He had to get away for the sake of the children and Fanny and himself. Even if they couldn't prove him guilty it would be a horrible scandal. It would get into the papers and he'd have to go into court.

He took another drink and as he put down the bottle he noticed a cap lying on the floor. It was old and stained and greasy. For a long time, half-hypnotized, he stared at it, trying to imagine its owner. It was the cap of a thief or a gunman. Who was it? What was he like? If he only knew he could save himself. And why had he come to see Rosie? He couldn't have come to rob her because the bracelets were still on her arm. He thought, "I could take the cap to the police and say, 'This belongs to the man who killed Rosie,'" and then he saw that he

couldn't do that because they'd arrest him and give him up to horror and scandal and imprisonment. He mustn't touch the cap nor anything in the room. He had to get out as quickly as possible before there were people in the street to see him leaving the flat.

He looked at Rosie again and then he remembered how sometimes, when she was drunk, she'd been in terror about her soul, and awkwardly he went over to the drawer of the dressing-table and took out her rosary and unclasping one of the stiffening hands he folded the dead fingers over it. As he lifted the hand the bracelets made a faint tinkling sound which made him feel cold with terror. Then he experienced a sudden intense desire to kiss her but as he bent down again the horror of death overcame him again and he turned away.

A sudden panic took possession of him. Without knowing what he was doing he flung open the door to escape and then remembered that he couldn't go into the street without a coat or hat. Turning back he went into the parlor and snatched them up and ran out again into the hall and down the stairs without even closing the door behind him. On the lower flight he missed a step and falling caught his arm beneath him. There was the sound of a bone cracking and he knew that he'd broken his arm. Swearing, he picked himself up and managed somehow to get into the coat and put the hat on his head. He turned the collar high about his throat and with his good hand he opened the door and peered out.

The street was filled with sun from end to end and the glitter of the cold brilliant morning blinded

him for a moment. Then he saw that the street was empty save for a belated milk wagon halted far down the block, and he slipped quickly through the door. Closing it behind him he turned west toward Madison Avenue, trying all the while to resist a primitive voice that kept urging him to run and run and run. All the time he swore beneath his breath and all the time he kept seeing Rosie, in spite of the cold brilliant sunlight, lying dead on the bed in the glow of the rosy lights. He kept seeing the diamonds glittering on her arm and the unreal look of the red varnished nails against the white skin of the hands. And he kept hearing her singing, "Diamond bracelets Woolworth doesn't sell, Baby."

As he turned the corner he halted suddenly, caught by a new horror. He had left behind his emerald shirt studs and his collar. He thrust his hand inside his coat in a wild hope that he had made a mistake, but they were not there. They were lying in Rosie's flat along with the stained and greasy cap. He couldn't go back for fear of being seen and trapped, but he couldn't go back either and see Rosie again lying dead.

He thought, "My God! Did any man ever pay such a price?" and, pitying himself, he kept saying over and over again that it wasn't true. If his arm was broken it would have pained him the way his shoulder pained him that time the roan polo pony fell on him, and his arm only felt a little numb. He couldn't feel any pain at all, even when he touched it. And he thought wildly, "Why am I standing here on the corner of the street like a damned fool? I've got to run. I've got to run some place. I've

got to hide myself." He was shivering and cold and he wanted to be warm, in a warm bed with the covers drawn over his head.

CHAPTER XV

WHEN he was a dozen blocks from Rosie's flat it occurred to him for the first time that he did not know whither he was bound. He kept hurrying on and on in the direction of his own house by habit as an animal in flight returns to its hiding place. And now when he thought of it, his own house seemed to be the only place to go. He couldn't go to a club at this hour of the morning and he couldn't wake up some friend without explaining why he had come in at such an hour disheveled and collarless with a broken arm. He couldn't sit in a railway station or a cheap restaurant because some one might see him and when the thing was discovered some one would come into court and testify that he had been seen wandering about aimlessly. But he had to go somewhere and hide.

If he went home he told himself that he would have to face Fanny and make up some story of how he had broken his arm. Fanny wouldn't know that he had come home in the early morning. She'd never know that he hadn't been at home sleeping in the room next to hers all night. She'd make a scene and accuse him of having been drunk, but suddenly he wasn't afraid any longer of her scenes. They didn't seem important. She could scream and cry and call him a beast and a swine, but after all that couldn't

do him any harm. It wouldn't really matter after what had happened.

His head ached horribly and his arm began all at once to pain him with a dull gnawing pain, and he wanted to be in his own room in bed. He wanted to sleep, numbly and abysmally, so that for a little time none of these horrible things would exist and he could waken at last with a clear head which wouldn't let him do such stupid things as leaving behind him the collar and shirt studs.

He turned into Park Avenue and the street had a strange unreal look of a street which he had never seen before. It couldn't be possible that after what had happened the sun was shining brilliantly on the banked-up snow. Taxis were beginning to move, plunging through the deep drifts, and before the doors of the great apartment houses men had begun to sweep away the snow. In the middle of the street there was a great machine at work which swept up whole drifts and, swinging them overhead, dumped them into waiting trucks. Men with fire hoses were washing snow down the gutters. In the brilliant sunlight everything was too cheerful and active and normal.

As he walked he felt suddenly so tired that nothing seemed to matter. He didn't care any longer that people might see him returning home in the early morning. He didn't care what Fanny would think or do. He wanted only to lie down and sleep, and presently he had a desire born of his great weariness to turn and go straight to the police and tell them everything he knew and afterward he could have peace of mind and rest even in a stone cell

behind iron bars. But in the next moment terror overtook him again and he told himself that such a course would bring only ruin and calamity.

He began all over again to assure himself that the whole thing wasn't true. Such a thing couldn't happen to a man like him, Jim Towner, who was rich and a gentleman. Things like that didn't happen to gentlemen. Gentlemen weren't murderers. Everybody knew that. Nobody could really believe that he'd killed Rosie no matter how bad it looked. He told himself that he didn't deserve such bad luck. He hadn't run around as much as most men and he'd been fairly faithful to Fanny. There was that one time in Paris which didn't count and that Stevens woman on the Riviera and then Rosie. There had never been any one else and Fanny didn't know about any of them, so it couldn't hurt her. Besides, what did she expect him to do?

Maybe, if he wasn't sent to prison or the chair, things would be better now with Fanny. He wouldn't have to decide about giving up Rosie because all that had been decided for him. He'd be a slave to Fanny and try to make up for everything and maybe he could get her back to the country with the horses and they'd live a simple happy life and have a comfortable old age. And then immediately he saw that it wouldn't be like that at all. Fanny would never forget it and as long as he lived she'd be throwing it up to him and using it as a club over him. She'd make life Hell for him if she didn't leave him flat and marry that skunk Melbourn. Maybe, after all, that

was the best way. If she married Melbourn, he himself would have peace at any rate. He could go away and hide himself in the country.

In the midst of his thoughts he found himself suddenly before his own door and terror again took possession of him. He thought, "I've been jumping ahead as if it was all over, and it's only begun. I've got Hell and Hell and Hell before me. It's only just begun." And he thought suddenly of killing himself. He could go up to his own room and quietly shoot himself and then it wouldn't matter whether he'd murdered Rosie or not. He could just sleep forever and wouldn't be tired any more. He wouldn't even have to bother about having his arm set. And maybe that way he'd find Rosie again and she'd make him comfortable and happy and give him a good time.

Automatically he turned the key in the lock. He did it awkwardly with his left hand, and, pushing open the door, the first thing he saw was a pair of skates lying on the hall table. It was the skates which changed everything. They were Elizabeth's skates and as soon as he saw them he saw not the skates but her face, flushed and happy as she came in from the park, and he knew that he couldn't kill himself. He couldn't give his children a suicide for a father along with all the other scandal, and if he killed himself they'd make him a murderer too because they'd all say he'd done it because he had killed Rosie. He'd have to stick and fight it out no matter what it cost him. The worst they could do was to prove that he'd been living with Rosie. That wasn't so bad. Plenty

of men did things like that, and things like that people forgot very quickly.

He felt so tired that he was all confused in his head and for a moment he was suddenly relieved and happy because it seemed to him that he was going upstairs to find Rosie and tell her everything and she would find a way out, and then he remembered that Rosie was dead and that he was going to tell everything to Fanny who was alive, because he had to tell somebody. He knew that he couldn't live any longer without speaking of it. He couldn't sleep or eat. Maybe Fanny would be decent about it and help. Somebody had to help. He couldn't carry on alone. Maybe Fanny would remember that they'd been happy together once and maybe she'd think of the children. Anyway, she'd help because she wouldn't want the scandal on her own account. Slowly, step by step, he dragged himself up the stairs, cursing his luck all the way.

2

By the time he had reached her door, he wasn't even afraid of her any longer. He simply opened the door and walked into her room. The curtains were drawn and in the dull half light she was lying asleep in the bed, looking pretty and pink against the lace of the pillows. At sight of her a shadow of astonishment and of faint desire crossed his tired brain. It had been years since he had seen her thus asleep and unconscious, not knowing that he was looking at her, and now in her sleep she didn't have that expression of exasperation and discontent which crossed her face whenever he came near her. He

didn't feel the old desire to escape from her as quickly as possible. She looked young and he saw her not as the bad-tempered discontented Fanny of reality but as the Fanny he'd married nearly twenty years earlier. She wasn't exciting and heady like Rosie but she was finer and more delicate. It astonished him that he had forgotten how pretty she was, and something about all the feminine lace and frippery that surrounded her excited him faintly. It all happened quickly, deep in his consciousness, far behind all the weariness and anxiety. There was even a sudden flicker of jealousy that she belonged to Melbourn instead of himself, for he was too tired now even to pretend to himself that what he knew was true wasn't true.

He saw that the floor was littered with her clothes. The gown of pink chiffon, the chemise, the silk knickers and the stockings and gilt slippers lay where they had fallen and it struck him as odd that Fanny who was so fastidious and had a maid to pick up everything for her, should have left her room in such disorder. Rosie was like that. Rosie just threw everything on the floor. But not Fanny.

He went over to the foot of the bed and stood there for a moment looking down at her and presently he said softly, "Fanny." She stirred but did not waken and for a moment the old fear of the scene she would make and the bitter things she would say swept over him again. But he knew that he had to tell somebody. He had to have somebody to help him out of this mess, and again softly and with deprecation he said, "Fanny," and, feeling weak and exhausted, he sat down suddenly on the edge of the

bed and laid his good hand gently on her ankle. The involuntary action frightened him but he had neither the will nor the strength to rise.

3

Fanny, opening her eyes slowly and still lost in sleep, was aware that there was a man sitting on the bed and vaguely she fancied that it was Melbourn come back to make his peace. Then slowly, as she wakened, she understood that it was not Melbourn but Jim. He had entered her room and was sitting on her bed. For a moment she thought she was dreaming but almost at once she saw that there could be no doubt of Jim's reality. It was daylight and he was sitting there, dressed in evening clothes and wearing an overcoat. His shirt was open and he wore no collar. His hair was rumpled and one lock hung over his forehead giving him the look of a dissipated boy. Suddenly she was wildly angry and said, "What are you doing here at this hour of the morning?" and sat upright in the bed.

"There's something I've got to tell you . . . something terrible."

"You're drunk again. You're disgusting."

"I was drunk. I'm not drunk now. Before God I'm not drunk."

"What do you mean by waking me at this ungodly hour?"

"Listen, Fanny. For God's sake, listen. I'm not drunk. Something awful has happened. I've got to tell you. You've got to help me." He covered his face with one

hand. "For God's sake, Fanny, you've got to be a sport and help me."

For the first time she saw that he wasn't drunk now and that he was in earnest. This was a Jim she had never seen before—a Jim who was neither defiant nor entrenched in a stupid bull-like stubbornness. He was all crumpled. He was even pitiful.

"I'm nearly dead. I don't care whether I live or die."

Mysteriously and suddenly in the midst of her disgust she had an impulse to pity him but she did not allow herself to show any softness. She said bitterly, "I suppose you've got yourself into some scrape. I can't go about looking after you all the time. I can't be a wet nurse to you."

"Go on. Say anything you like. It isn't my fault, really. Only listen to me and help me. You've got to for everybody's sake."

She reached out and took up a yellow bed jacket and put it round her shoulders. Then she said wildly, "Go on and tell me the worst."

"It's worse than you think. It's awful."

"No woman ever had to put up with such a husband."

He had taken his hand down from his face but he didn't look at her. He kept fingering a bit of the lace coverlet. Suddenly he blurted out, "Somebody's been killed and they'll think I did it."

"What do you mean?"

"A woman's been murdered . . . Oh, God! . . . I don't know what to do. I don't know what to do."

"What are you talking about? Pull yourself together and make sense."

"Maybe you heard about it. Maybe you heard about Rosie and me?"

"I haven't heard anything. It never interested me . . . the kind of women you chose to run around with."

Still fingering the bit of lace and not looking at her, he began to tell her the whole story from the beginning, how he'd met Rosie at a night club and they'd liked each other, and then how presently he set her up in a flat. She didn't want a big flat but just a little one. She was a nice girl, not a gold digger. She'd made him comfortable and happy. They hadn't lived together very much, just now and then. It was all just because she made him comfortable and cozy and gave him a good time. She helped him fill in the hours when he didn't know what to do with himself. He wasn't being unfaithful to her, Fanny, because there hadn't been anything between them for so long.

As he talked he looked more and more boyish and helpless. He was like a boy trying to be bad and sophisticated who'd found himself suddenly in a mess from which he hadn't enough of experience to extricate himself; and as he talked, the sense of his helplessness and shame somehow penetrated the wall of her hardness and irritation and touched her. She saw he wasn't a bad depraved man but a helpless, rather stupid fellow who had got himself into a mess. She fought against the feeling but it didn't go away altogether.

He went on telling her about the affair, that it had gone

on for nearly a year and she thought suddenly that it must have begun about the same time she met Melbourn that afternoon in the roadhouse. Half listening to him, half thinking of herself, she told herself that her affair wasn't as low as his because at any rate Melbourn was a distinguished man and this woman he was talking about must be just a strumpet. It was the woman's kindness he kept talking about, how she'd taken care of him and made him comfortable and looked out for him when he'd drunk too much.

"You'd have liked her," he said. "She wasn't a bad woman at all."

Fanny thought, "Men always talk like that. She was probably a filthy little gold digger," and she felt inexplicably jealous of Rosie, more from injured vanity than because Jim had actually betrayed her. He stopped talking again and began tracing a design in the lace over and over again with his finger.

"Well, go on . . . I thought you must have had somebody . . . Then what . . . What happened next?"

"Last night when I left Hector's I was already a little drunk. I couldn't help it. I hated everybody on the party, and . . . and . . ." (He couldn't speak of Melbourn. That would make everything worse.) "Well, there were other reasons. And I went to the night club."

"You aren't telling me that your woman was Rosa Dugan?"

For the first time he looked up at her. "Yes. But what's Rosa Dugan to you? What do you know about her?"

"Nothing. Only that everybody knows her. I didn't know it was as bad as that."

She didn't say exactly what she meant. She meant that she could not believe a woman like Rosa Dugan could be attracted by him. Why, Rosa Dugan was a great artist. She was a beautiful woman and men were crazy about her and literary people wrote columns about her art. She looked sharply at Jim wondering what it was that a woman like Rosa Dugan who could have all the men she wanted found attractive in a stupid fellow like Jim. He wasn't even a good lover.

She said suddenly, "I suppose you gave her a small fortune."

"No, I gave her hardly anything. At least, it wasn't anything for a woman like that. I suppose at most I've given her ten thousand dollars and she didn't ask for that. She's never asked for anything." Then he added humbly, "I guess she must have liked me."

As she watched him a funny thing began to happen to Fanny, a thing that a year ago could not have happened to her. She began to see Jim in a new way. She saw that in spite of his drinking he was still a handsome man. She began in the strangest way to think of him not as her husband but as a lover. Because Rosa Dugan had found him desirable he seemed faintly desirable to her, and a strange half-formed thought occurred to her. She might go back to Jim and find what she had to have. For a moment she did not even hear what he was saying. He was attractive with his handsome head and bull-like strength.

". . . by the time she could leave the club, I'd passed out altogether. She got me back to the flat somehow and up the stairs and put me to bed on the sofa in the parlor."

At the word "parlor" Fanny returned again to reality. The word made her see suddenly Rosa and all her cheap background. She listened again, watching Jim and thinking idly that with his hair all rumpled he looked like the Jim she had been in love with nearly twenty years ago.

"I wakened this morning about daylight and when I tried to go into her room I found the door locked. I knocked and called her but nobody answered and then I began to be scared and didn't know what to do so I broke down the door and when I got into the room"—he paused for a moment as if he couldn't bring himself to say what he had to say—"I found she was dead."

He stopped fingering the lace and put his hand over his face again. "It was awful. Somebody had strangled her while I was asleep, drunk, in the next room."

For the first time something of his own horror touched Fanny. She sat up very straight in the bed and then slowly she said, "You mean Rosa Dugan is dead? You mean it was Rosa Dugan who was murdered last night?"

"Yes."

"You mean you were in the flat when it happened?"

"I was drunk. I was asleep. I never heard her scream."

For a long time she was silent and then slowly she said, "You're sure you didn't kill her yourself?"

"No, why should I kill her? I . . . I loved her. She was so damned good to me."

"But you were drunk. Maybe you didn't know."

"When I'm drunk I'm not like that. I'm not quarrelsome. I just go to sleep. Besides, I couldn't have killed her because I was locked in another room. Don't you see that?"

Yes, she saw that. She saw much more. She knew that Jim couldn't kill anybody. If you knew him, you knew that. A man like Melbourn might kill a woman but not Jim. He just couldn't do such a thing.

Slowly her sense of horror increased. She began, like Jim, to believe that this thing wasn't true. It couldn't have happened to people like themselves. Such things didn't happen.

"You're sure she's dead?"

"How can you ask me that? I made sure." And suddenly he saw Rosie again cold and beautiful with the red varnished nails and the crucifix and the diamond bracelet, and it seemed to him that he saw her really for the first time. All these things were Rosie.

"There was a cap on the floor. The man who murdered her had left it behind. It was a dirty greasy cap."

"It was somebody who came to rob her."

"No, he didn't take her bracelets."

Fanny pressed her hands against her head. It seemed to her that she couldn't even think any more. Her head was full of horrible thoughts churning round and round. She told herself she must not go crazy. She must think now more clearly than she had ever thought before.

She managed to say, "But if the cap's there, it's a clue. It'll prove you didn't do it."

"It's worse than that. I left behind my shirt studs and my collar. They're still there too."

She saw that that was what Jim would do. He'd get frightened like a child and lose his head and not think at all about how to save himself.

"And you can't go back now and get them?"

"No. Maybe they've found her already. She has a nigger maid who comes in at eight-thirty every morning."

Suddenly he said, "You see she took off the collar and took out the studs so I'd be comfortable. She must have laid them on the piano." And again it didn't seem possible to him that Rosie who had taken out the studs and taken off his collar was dead. It wasn't true. It couldn't be true.

"What are we going to do?" he asked dully. "I can't think any more."

"I don't know. I don't know."

Slowly, all the horror of it began to become real. She saw the scandal and the headlines in the papers and she saw worse things if they couldn't prove he was innocent, things which were almost beyond her imagination. Such things didn't happen to people like them. They only happened to clerks and gunmen and people who lived in little towns and in the slums. She became suddenly as helpless as he was and in her helplessness she forgot that he bored her and that at times she hated him. She saw that this thing touched her too and the children. She couldn't think of anything but how they were to escape. They must get away somehow. They must escape to some forgotten part of the earth, quickly before they arrested Jim.

She, too, suddenly felt a wild primitive impulse to hide herself forever.

She said suddenly, "But they know your name. They'll find you right away."

"No. They don't know my real name. I don't think even Rosie knew it. They called me Mr. Wilson. I'd heard of another fellow who did it."

That, thought Fanny, made it better. It gave them time . . . a little time until the police found out who Mr. Wilson really was. And then the horror of the newspapers dawned upon her in its full violence. She saw the headlines FASHIONABLE CLUB MAN AND POLO PLAYER. And then in the midst of the horror she was aware that he was looking at her helplessly and pitifully and, strangest of all, that he was attractive and appealing with his hair all rumpled and his shirt open exposing his muscular throat. He was really more handsome than Melbourn. She felt a sudden desire to cry wildly and hysterically and knew at once that she couldn't because one of them had to keep his head and that Jim was too far gone to be of any use. He was all crumpled and weak and just kept repeating, "We've got to think of something quick. We've got to . . ." and all at once he turned white and began to shake.

She thought, "He's going to faint," and suddenly sprang out of bed and fetched her own smelling salts and held them under his nose. Then she went quickly into his room and brought his own bottle of whiskey and gave him a long drink. He leaned against the foot of the bed with a deep sigh and she felt an overpowering desire to place her hand on his forehead and brush his hair back out of

his eyes, and this action in turn gave birth to sudden, almost voluptuous, desire to comfort him and take care of him. She was aware that she was being noble and the experience awakened in her a strange sense of satisfaction, which for an instant wiped out all else—her anger and disappointment at losing Melbourn, her irritation at Jim, even all the horror she had felt a moment before. She gave herself up to the emotion and, standing by the bed, she pressed his head against her breasts and, stroking his hair, she said, "It'll be all right. We'll find a way out. We've got to," and then softly, "You can count on me, Jim. It's all right." And she began to cry at the spectacle of her own goodness and nobility.

For the first time in all her life some one had asked her for strength and now it excited her. She felt his head resting against her and for a moment she loved him passionately with a kind of love she had never before experienced. She felt noble and splendid. She thought, "I'll stand by him against all the world no matter what comes. The world will see what a woman I can be." It was like the satisfaction of an actress aware that she is giving a superb performance.

For a long time she remained thus stroking his head and talking to him in a low voice and presently she was aware that there were tears running down his face and she wanted suddenly to cry and knew that she could not. She had to keep her head and think what was to be done. They'd have to get some one to help them and she began thinking over all their friends and acquaintances, all the people with power or influence which might be of use, and

always her thoughts came back to one person. There was one who could be of the greatest use, who had all the power that was necessary. But instinctively she kept turning away from the name, trying in vain to think of some one better suited, but she could not because there was no one who had the power and also the clearness of head. He was the only one in whom she had, despite her will to the contrary, an absolute faith. When she thought of him she saw his face again and when she saw his face she was certain that he could achieve whatever he set out to achieve. If she could bring herself to ask him for help, he would be without scruples because, in a way, he placed himself above conventions and moralities and even law. He'd never crumple up and be useless like Jim. He could save Jim if he saw fit to do it. She saw beyond all doubt that Melbourn was the one person in the world who could help them.

She ceased stroking Jim's hair and said, "You'd better have some coffee and a bath and then go to bed and try to get some sleep. You're no good to anybody in this state. I'll call you if I need you and I'll work something out in the meanwhile. The best thing we can do, I think, is to get on the first boat bound for Europe and clear out. We'll take Elizabeth with us and young Jim can follow us as soon as he comes down from St. Matthew's. We can't leave them behind to face it."

Out of all the speech it was the word "bath" which stuck in his tired brain. It seemed to him that if he could have a good bath he'd be able to wash away a great deal of the dirt and despair that clung to him. If he could have a bath

and some sleep everything would be different afterward. He got up from the bed and for the first time looked at Fanny directly and with such intensity that she turned her head away nervously. He said, "You're a great girl, Fanny. I always knew it."

The remark annoyed her and in a sudden return of viperishness she said, "I hope this will be a lesson to you."

"I'll do anything you like. I'll do my best to make life happy for you."

Suddenly she experienced a wild desire to have him take her in his arms, to beat and abuse her and to make love to her, and in the same moment she saw that if he had been cruel to her she would have loved him always with a passion different from this maternal feeling which she had for him now. If he had been cruel like Melbourn she would have been happy during all the years they had lost.

She heard him saying, "Oh, I forgot one thing. I think I've broken my arm. I fell down the stairs when I was running away. Maybe you could help me get my clothes off. I don't think I can do it alone."

She felt his arm and when he winced with pain she said, "It's broken all right. I'll ring up Doctor Barnes. Come along and I'll help you undress."

Together they went into his room and she herself turned on the taps in the bath and then came to help him painfully remove his clothes, and as she helped him a curious excitement took possession of her because Jim belonged to her and she had to save him. Melbourn seemed a stranger very far away and the scene at the door the night before had happened years ago instead of only last night. For

the first time she was able to hate him without any regrets, as some one who had in a curious way not only hurt her but Jim as well and the whole relation between herself and Jim. Yet it was Melbourn who had made possible this new feeling she had for Jim. Melbourn had taught her to think of him as a man where before she had thought of him only as a husband who had certain rights over her. She wanted suddenly to love Jim because he was helpless and handsome and masculine and she wanted him to love her.

She heard him saying, "Maybe, after this it'll be better, Fan. I'll do my best."

He hadn't called her Fan in years and the sound of the name touched her. But the sudden happiness was followed at once by despair because they couldn't be happy all at once without any difficulties. They'd only begun the ordeal that was before them. They hadn't yet begun to taste the suffering and shame which they must drink to the dregs. She began again to feel noble and dramatic and to phrase her own thoughts in high-sounding language. She was free now of Melbourn and she could show him that it was Jim she really loved and that he meant nothing to her.

As she helped Jim free from the shirt from which Rosie had removed the studs, she thought suddenly, "It isn't true that I'm standing here with the brilliant sunlight outside. It can't be true. No woman has ever been through what I've been through in the last twelve hours. No woman has ever behaved as well as I've behaved. Maybe

Melbourn will see that, after all, I'm not a shallow, silly woman."

And in spite of everything, the fear and shame and sordidness of the whole affair, she experienced a sense of exhilaration, as if at thirty-eight things had begun to happen to her for the first time, as if she had never before lived at all, and in the midst of such thoughts she experienced an intense curiosity about Rosa Dugan and a morbid desire to go to the flat and see her, lying there dead, out of the running forever. And then all at once she remembered the scene on the doorstep. Melbourn was gone and she would never have him again. It was horrible . . . unbearable. . . .

CHAPTER XVI

FROM the moment Nancy Champion was born power and wealth and influence had conspired to make life easy and luxurious. When she desired a thing she had only to ask for it because there was always money with which to buy what she wanted or friends who had power when money was of no avail. And the Champions as a family had always understood the only value which money has; they used it to make life simpler by bribing and by buying away difficulties and irritations. With it they were able to purchase freedom from such annoyances as tax returns and passports and customs troubles and the running of households. Sometimes they had so much freedom from the sordid machinery in life that they fell into mischief for want of something to occupy their minds.

As Nancy grew out of childhood she had discovered slowly that she was charming and beautiful and that in her charm and her beauty she possessed a weapon quite as powerful as wealth or influence, and being a spoiled woman, she had never been too scrupulous in using any weapon. The only law which she recognized was the law of her own desire. She cheated, she smuggled, she bribed, not because she possessed any criminal instinct but because such methods seemed to her to make life easy and smooth, and because she broke laws and codes with a charming simplicity, there were never any consequences. At sixty when her beauty had faded and her charm and vivacity were tainted by a corroding bitterness because she had, like any plain stupid woman, to fade and turn old and at last to die, she remained luxurious and spoiled.

She did not even travel like other women. She returned from her exile, after twenty-five years, traveling in state as royalty once traveled and millionaires now travel. Because her husband was rich and powerful the two of them shared what was known as the Royal Suite, with two bed-rooms, two sitting-rooms and two baths on the most splendid of sea-going hotels. If she chose she had all her meals in her own sitting-room. Stewards and stewardesses and pursers and ship's officers sought only to make her comfortable and content. And now as she neared New York there was no tiresome business of rising early to have passports examined at quarantine. There was no boredom over customs. . . . She had not even the annoyance of packing or filling in declarations. There were maids and secretaries eager to relieve her amusing mind

of every silly detail. As the *Mauretania* steamed slowly up the channel in the brilliant winter sunlight, she rose late and lingered in her bath and over her toilette, taking great care with herself, polishing her nails and regarding her make-up minutely, making certain that the dye in her hair did not betray itself where the hair was parted on the side; for miraculously she no longer had the shining black hair which Philip remembered in the garden in Passy; after many experiments it had turned a beautiful and lustrous red which agreed marvelously with the whiteness of her skin and the blueness of her eyes and by its very look of artificiality gave her a piquancy which she had lacked before.

As she sat regarding herself in the mirror of the dressing-table, it struck her as extraordinary that there were really no wrinkles in her face. Her skin was smooth and soft and white like the skin of a young girl. Her hair was young and alive, and her figure firm and slender. She thought of her own grandmother who at thirty had looked older than she herself looked at sixty and wondered whether there would ever be a day when she herself would find the struggle hopeless and be forced to yield to age. In this day, she told herself, women were ageless.

She was the perfect product of the most expensive masseurs and beauty specialists. She had done strange exercises and been massaged and had operations and used the most absurd artificialities always toward the same end—that she might remain young and so beautiful that when she entered a room people were instantly aware of her presence, and she had concentrated upon this one end for

so long that it was only the shell of herself which now had any reality for her. The core, the heart, the soul no longer existed. And so, in her minute search for wrinkles and sagging muscles she never saw that although the shell was exquisite and deceptive and brilliant, it deceived no one but herself. She never saw that when she entered a room although people were still aware of her presence and thought, "What a beautiful woman!" they felt almost at once a kind of shock and repulsion and thought, "How wonderfully preserved," as if they were regarding a stuffed bird of paradise. For the inside was old and tired and a little decayed and the decay showed itself through cracks in the beautiful armor of which she herself was quite unaware. It did not occur to her that people, talking to her, were made uneasy without knowing the reason by the very smoothness and perfection of her skin and the somewhat rigid and false youthfulness of her figure and the tired timbre of her beautiful voice and the dull look which despite everything sometimes tarnished the luster of the lovely eyes. She never saw that there was something bordering upon repulsion in a creature who looked like a young girl and was an old woman.

It had been years now since she had known any relaxation. Never once did she sit comfortably reading a novel in the sun careless and selfless. She had read novels and she had lain in the sun but always with her mind distracted by wondering whether the light was too brilliant so that she had to squint a little and so make tiny lines about her dark eyes, and she had lain in the sun not because she got from the sun any sensuous animal enjoyment, but because

the sun kept the muscles firm and made one look young. She had lain on the beaches of Biarritz and the Lido rigidly and thoughtfully making certain that she was becoming evenly tanned so that she would look well in the evening, tormented by the thought that although she detested cold water she must swim for the sake of her figure and that although she was lazy and hated exercise she must twist and contort her poor tired body into position that would reduce the hips and strengthen the muscles of the abdomen. And afterward in her own room she had to spend another hour with lotions and creams so that her skin, while tanned, would not become dry and leathery. And now at sixty when people saw her they thought, "What a marvelously preserved woman of fifty!"

She did not thus torture herself in order to gain or hold a lover because she had long ago given up love. She did it because she could not bear to think of a time when people would not look at her and tell her that she was beautiful.

2

She did not even deceive her husband although she fancied that he too thought her fifteen years younger than her age. She could believe this because her life in Europe dated from her elopement with Patrick Dantry at the age of thirty-five and so no one could know her exact age. But Sir John had no illusions. He had married her because he was fond of her and because her hopelessly feminine absurdities amused him but most of all because when he found himself a widower at sixty, she was exactly what he desired as a wife . . . It was not love that he

wanted any longer, but the affection and companionship of an amusing woman and a wife who could sit at the head of his table in the handsome dining-room at Portland Gate and entertain the most distinguished or the most shady or the most boring guests with equal brilliance and charm and a handsome woman who would ornament his house and add luster to the closing days of his career. He found that every one liked her because in her vanity she was without discrimination and in her hunger for admiration she sought only to please every one so that she should be loved and admired in return.

He had had his love when he was young and vigorous with a wife who was all that Nancy was not, a wife who had been plain and a little dowdy, comfortable and understanding and selfless who had borne him five children and lived only to make him comfortable and happy and successful. Nancy made him happy and fairly comfortable but that was only because she had learned that by making men comfortable and happy you made them also good-humored and gained over them a hold that was the strongest of all bonds. If men were happy they loved you and told you that you were pretty. And the comforts that Sir John needed at sixty-nine were not the same comforts he had needed at twenty-nine.

He had not even any illusions regarding her past, for he knew the story of Patrick Dantry and his tragic death and he knew that even now a quarter of a century afterward she still kept a photograph of Patrick Dantry always with her. He knew too that there had been other men in her life, how many he did not know and did not care, but

he knew too that such distractions were long ago finished and need not trouble him now and that all the desire of her ardent nature had long ago burned itself out into the ashes of a hungry vanity. He knew too that in spite of everything she had always remained a lady and that her past, however scandalous it might have been, had been discreetly and elegantly scandalous and of a kind which did not greatly injure either her character or her position. In the past there had been a few people who would not receive her nor go to her house in Wilton Crescent, but by now these were all dead or no longer of any consequence. The war had made a great difference in people's point of view and even conservative people no longer worried themselves about peccadillos. The ones who still disapproved of her past no longer concerned him because in his old age, after a long life of hard work and respectability, he was seeking to make up for much that he had lost in his youth and he liked company and parties that were smart and hard and brilliant and young people who were a little fast and dashing as he would have liked to have been himself when he was young if he had not been so busy with success. In such a world Nancy had a solid position; she was almost a queen in her own way, who stood as the unmoral example to all the others of a woman who had lived extravagantly and lost nothing by it. He was like a little boy who reaches at last the jam which he has known all along was on the highest shelf of the cupboard. He had had a full life. Born of a poor county family, he had made himself immensely rich and with

the next honors he knew that he would be Lord Elsmore of Crawley.

3

She was still sitting at the dressing-table when Sir John knocked and came in. He was a big heavy man with a deep hearty voice, a friendly manner and small shrewd blue eyes, dressed carefully and immaculately in dark tweeds. He wore on one hand a heavy gold ring set with an onyx Assyrian seal that had been brought up by a crew of his oil drillers from the depths of Mesopotamian clay. He looked pink faced and healthy and he smiled at her.

"Well, my dear, are you ready for the return to the Promised Land?"

She laughed and gave him his morning kiss which was the merest brush of his gray mustaches against her cheek but which meant far more than any simple word of greeting. It meant that they were pleased with each other and that their bargain was still a success.

"I've a wireless for you. It just came."

"I suppose it's from Hector."

She tore it open and read it and handed it to him.

It said:

REGRET TOO ILL TO MEET BOAT WILL TELEPHONE HOTEL SAVINA JERROLD WANTS YOU FOR TEA LOVE

HECTOR

She looked at Sir John and smiled. The telegram needed no explanation for he knew all about Hector. She had even warned him that he must not be upset by Hector's

unpleasant manner. He knew that she had not seen him in twenty-five years.

She said, "He's being cold, but at least he's answered me."

"Who's Savina Jerrold?"

"She's an old friend of the family. I knew her when I was a girl. She's a good sort . . . jolly and understanding, one of those important old maids, interested in good works. She's very important, Savina, as rich as Croesus."

While she was speaking it occurred to her that she no longer knew what Savina looked like. The Savina she saw in her imagination was an old maid of about forty and Savina must now be nearly seventy. The Savina she thought of on reading the telegram was a buxom romantic woman who had invited her to tea with Patrick Dantry again and again after Carstairs grew suspicious and wouldn't have Patrick in the house. Savina had a way of disappearing and leaving them alone for long periods of time, as if she didn't know what was going on between them, perhaps because, never having had any romance of her own, it gave her a kind of satisfaction to help the intrigues of others. It was in Savina's drawing-room in Thirty-sixth Street that they had concocted their plan of elopement. A pathetic good-natured woman was Savina, who'd never had a lover or even an admirer unless you could count a poor fish like Hector and in the end he'd run off to Italy, people said, in order to escape her. It was odd that after twenty-five years she was going to take up her life again just where it had broken off—in Savina's drawing-room in Thirty-sixth Street.

In the midst of these thoughts she was aware that John was bustling about the cabin, collecting the things she always left indolently strewn about because there was always some one to pick them up for her. He was collecting here a letter, there a box of cigarettes, here a novel and there a box of chocolates. Despite the noise he made during such operations, she forgot him altogether and sat with her elbows on the edge of the dressing-table staring into the mirror, seeing no reflection there. So completely had she forgotten herself that her tired face seemed suddenly to fall into a decay of tiny lines and sagging muscles. For a moment neither Henry nor the great ship nor New York existed any longer because she was living in the past, seeing Patrick again, black-haired and charming and carefree, with a wicked talent for enjoying himself that infected others and destroyed all sense of morality and respectability. He wanted simply to enjoy himself in a world that was made for enjoyment. She was thinking how she had fallen in love with him that summer at Newport before her poor sister Mary was dead and how she had never dared let him know how she felt, and she was remembering his tenderness and wild good humor and his embraces and the excitement of being near him and the intoxicating delight of simply sitting beside him on the terrace before the hotel in Switzerland, drinking chocolate and looking out over the mountains, and then she remembered slowly the cold horror of the night when he did not return from climbing and the knowledge that he was dead and that she would never see him again.

She sighed suddenly and wondered whether she could

bear to step into Savina's drawing-room again and see the lamps and the family portraits and the ugly old-fashioned furniture and again eat the delicious things which Savina had for tea. She was suddenly afraid to return. She wanted to stay aboard and return to London which had no memories that could hurt her, because all the others who came after Patrick had made no difference and left no scars.

And then she heard John saying, "Do you want any of these things, my dear? Because we must be ready to go ashore," and a sense of the actual returned to her. She was an old woman and the wife of this ruddy, pleasant, commonplace Englishman, standing with his hands filled with books and boxes, and the other thing had happened a quarter of a century ago. Nothing could hurt her any more because she was so old that nothing could happen to her.

"No," she said. "Give them to the steward."

"This too?" he asked and when she turned to look she saw that he was holding up a diamond bracelet and smiling at her as if he thought her absurd and charming. "I found it on the floor."

"Of course not."

"You ought to take better care of your jewels, my dear. It's hard on servants to leave such things lying about."

He crossed the cabin and, wrapping the bracelet carefully in tissue paper, put it into her jewel box, and watching him she thought how little people really ever knew of each other and how little he guessed what was passing in her mind and how little the bracelet meant to her. She

wouldn't have cared if it were missing and never found again.

She put on her hat and took up her mink coat. He helped her into it and said, "You're looking damned pretty, my dear," and she felt suddenly happy again and the lines went out of her face and her body suddenly straightened and seemed youthful. "You don't look a day over thirty."

It was a lie and the rankest flattery and in a way she knew it but she pretended not to know in order not to spoil his compliment and because it was much pleasanter to believe it.

"I must send some messages. I'll join you in a little while. Will I find you in here?"

"Yes. In here."

"You'll be all ready to land?"

"Of course. I'm ready now."

He knew that she wouldn't be ready and that at the last moment there would be a dozen things forgotten, but he was past the age where such things made him impatient, and for thirty years he had had a wife who was always ready and seated, waiting for him patiently.

He went out the door and at the sight of his burly back she smiled thinking that she could not do without him and that she had always been one of those women who could not live without men. Men were wonderful and women were tiresome. Life without a man was no life at all. And she had been lucky, now when she was no longer young, to have attracted a man like John.

She had lied to him deliberately because she had had no intention of remaining in the cabin and as soon as he was

gone, she stepped out onto the deck. Ever since they had left Southampton she had been plotting how she might be alone when they came in sight of New York, because New York and Patrick Dantry had become blended during the years into a single memory. In all her hardness and disillusionment this memory was the only soft spot which remained. Sometimes it seemed to her that the fifteen months they had spent together was the only real thing that had ever happened to her. All the years before as the wife of Malcolm Carstairs were nothing to her. It was as if she had never lived at all until she met Patrick; and the years afterward seemed theatrical and cheap and touched with bitterness. The New York which lived in her memory was the New York which she had shared with him and it returned to her now in fragments like Savina's drawing-room and the Metropolitan Museum and Delmonico's and the Aquarium. The thought of them filled her with pain but at the same time with an irresistible desire to revisit them all again. She wanted to come up the channel alone and have her first glimpse of New York unmarred by the presence of John who shared none of her memories and had no place in that distant past.

It was a brilliant winter morning with ice floating in the river beneath a thin veil of rising mist, and as she walked along the deck she encountered people she knew who said "Good morning" or stopped for a moment to tell her that she was looking handsome. It must, she thought, be true because three persons, one of them a woman, had told her so, and she wondered if it had been the thought of Patrick and the memories aroused by the return that made her

seem young and brilliant. It struck her that all the people she met on the deck seemed happy and excited, as if something in this air was stimulating and different from the sluggish air of Europe. People, she thought, began to laugh, and it struck her that it had been years since she had heard any one really laughing. It excited her to think that no one on the whole ship knew what was passing in her brain or even suspected the glamorous memories that had come alive again, and she was glad that in spite of all the tragedy she had known Patrick and loved him and thrown over everything for him. It was far better to have memories that were tragic than none at all.

For the sake of her figure she set out to do ten rounds of the deck. As the mist lifted slowly from the dark water she saw glittering in the sunlight the snow-covered shores of Staten Island with its queer, old-fashioned, wooden houses and all at once she knew that she was in America again. This was snow, American snow, real snow, and it had the look of belonging there and of meaning, unlike the snow of England and France, to remain for days and even weeks unmelted. There was snow in Switzerland but there it always seemed a part of the scenery arranged by plump pink hotel proprietors, which they put out each morning along with the chalets before the guests had wakened. This was real snow like the snow that lay in the valleys along the Hudson when she was a girl. The silly houses were like the old-fashioned wooden castles at Staatsburg. This snow lay in great drifts and banks covering the earth to the very edge of the channel where it made the water seem black like oil. The snow, she thought suddenly, like

everything else in America, the climate, the floods, the earthquakes, the hurricanes, was grander and more violent than elsewhere in the world.

New York—Manhattan—she knew must be lying just ahead thinly hidden by the mists and at any moment they might come suddenly upon the Battery with the purple dark Aquarium sitting like a giant chocolate cake by the edge of the water.

She turned suddenly to look behind her and when she saw there was no one following her, she quickly climbed the companionway to the hurricane deck. After the storm it was a still morning with only a faint wind that swept down the channel as the great ship moved inward from the sea. Pulling her hat over her eyes, she leaned against the rail watching the ships and barges slipping past, now a tug, now a garbage scow, now a white yacht bound for the Bahamas and Florida, a tramp carrying the Brazilian flag bound outward, and a white fruit ship setting out for the Caribbean. The gulls swooped and wheeled, glittering in the sunlight and uttering wild piercing cries below the faint line of the rising mist. And then all at once the Statue of Liberty appeared looming black and green out of the mist on the left. A ferryboat with drays and horses slipped across the bow and dimly ahead of the ship in the midst of the channel there appeared a vague gray mass like a mountain rising directly from the water. That must be New York. At the sight of it her heart began to beat wildly.

And then suddenly, as if a veil of gauze had been lifted, there appeared out of the mist a city which could not be real

nor built by the hand of man. Glittering in the winter sunlight tower after tower rose against the blue of the sky. It was not a city but a single enchanted castle, the fortress of a sorcerer, a city out of the Arabian nights like the city in the Tale of the Fisherman. From each tower there drifted a little plume of white steam. She began suddenly to cry.

This was not New York. It was not the city she had left. It was something unreal and dramatic and beautiful as few things built by the hand of man were beautiful. But somewhere far down at the basis of those shining towers there must be left something of the city she remembered. The ship moved nearer and the towers slowly changed positions. New ones emerged and others disappeared. No photograph nor any description could give a sense of their stupendous civilized beauty. Still crying she thought suddenly, "This is my city. These are my people. No other people could have imagined a city so fantastic and extravagant."

Nothing made any difference, neither her exile nor her alien husband nor even the other men she had known. Nothing had changed her. This was American air brilliant and clear and invigorating and American sunlight of a glittering brilliance which damp Europe never knew. And this city, she saw suddenly, was like Patrick—dazzling, beautiful, audacious and overpowering.

The towers and fortresses came nearer and nearer and in the clear air she could see presently people moving about like tiny insects across the white expanse of the Battery, and presently she turned her head and saw what

she was hungering to see. Just opposite her, dark against the white of the city, stood the great chocolate cake of the Aquarium. It was exactly as it had been twenty-five years ago. She began again to cry and almost immediately she heard a voice saying, "Is the American winter always as brilliant as this?" and John was standing beside her, but he was a stranger to her, a man whom she had never seen before. She recovered herself and said, "I don't know. I don't remember. It's been so long since I've spent a winter here."

When he saw that she had been crying he quietly slipped his arm about her waist and said abruptly, "There, my dear, don't take it so hard," and for the first time she thought that perhaps he might have divined why she had come up here alone.

She saw that he was embarrassed as he was always at the sight of any emotion and she tried to stop crying but the very touch of his arm about her waist made her cry the more. She was crying because she was coming home and because the city was so fantastic and beautiful and because John was so awkwardly kind, but most of all and what John could not guess because the sight of the absurd, round, old building had brought back to her a vivid memory of Patrick Dantry making love to her while they leaned on the brass rail looking down into the tank where the horseshoe crabs and the tortoises were crawling lazily about.

Out from the piers on either side of the great river tugs appeared like ducklings swimming out from the steep banks of a brook. They began nosing about among the

cakes of floating ice, whistling and shouting to each other and throwing out spray from their bows, scurrying from one side to another aimlessly until presently with a great clanging of bells the huge ship, pushed and pulled by the little tugs, began to turn slowly amid eddies of black oily water and fragments of churning ice, and with a gentle ease and skill it slid quietly into the narrow dock between the huge pier sheds, coming to rest with a gentle bump as if she had been a rowboat landing on the edge of a pond.

Out of the openings in the pier sheds hundreds of faces looked up toward the decks of the towering ship and voices cried in the silliest way, "Here I am, Mary," and "Look this way," and "Welcome back, darling." Handkerchiefs and hats and sticks were shaken and waved. There were shouts and excitement and tears and a spontaneous energy and unashamed emotion that seemed a part of the brilliant air itself. And Nancy, who had stopped crying, began to cry all over again, because she had never seen anything like this strange exciting city built for giants.

She felt ashamed before John and said, "I'm sorry. I can't help it. Parades of soldiers and military music and ships always make me cry. I feel the same way now."

The gangplanks slipped down. Trunks began to slide down chutes and other trunks and great wooden cases and sacks of mail to appear in great baskets of rope out of the depths of the ship.

Sir John's secretary appeared and said, "Mr. Melbourn is on board looking for you, sir," and as they turned to descend, Melbourn himself appeared.

He was dressed in dark clothes with a Derby and looked big and hard and powerful, and Nancy thought suddenly that he too was like the city and the invigorating air and all those people shouting and crying like children down below on the pier. She remembered that she had been crying and that her nose was red and that she looked old and ugly after she had taken such care to look her best. It struck her as Melbourn came toward her that he was more attractive than she had remembered and she began to grow excited and a little coquettish as women always did when he came into a room. She saw that in his face, which was neither handsome nor ugly, there was something relentless and proud and wilful which attracted her and she wished wickedly that she was really young instead of being an old lady shut up inside a body that was young. As she took his hand, she thought, "This is one of the new rulers of the world. Kings must have been like this in the days when Kings were Kings."

He was saying, "I've brought my car to take you to the hotel. Everything's been arranged about the landing. I hope you'll have lunch with me and afterward Sir John and I will leave you and get down to our pressing business. To-morrow night when you've rested a little, I'm giving a dinner for you."

She saw suddenly that everything had indeed changed, and that the life she was about to enter would have nothing to do with the life she had left behind twenty-five years ago. Still, she thought, there must be a few things left like Savina's drawing-room with its bad portraits and comfortable furniture and air of solid tradition. There

must be some place where she could rest and relax and forget herself in the past.

After John had collected the things she had forgotten in the cabin they went down the gangplank accompanied by Melbourn and two secretaries and went through the pier shed to the street where Melbourn's motor was awaiting them. In the doorway stood an old man with newspapers under his arm and at sight of him Nancy said suddenly, "Oh, buy me a paper," and Melbourn bought one of the papers and gave it to her.

Inside the motor, settled comfortably in the deep cushions, she took up the paper and looked at it. There was a picture of a woman sitting on a table with her knees crossed which covered the whole first page and above a headline which read, FAMOUS NIGHT CLUB SINGER STRANGLED IN EXCLUSIVE MURRAY HILL LOVE NEST. (Story on Second page.) She thought, "Murray Hill is where I once lived and where Savina lives," and it seemed to her that the place had been in some vague way desecrated.

Melbourn was looking at her and grinning, "All our papers," he said, "aren't as bad as that. Some of them are almost civilized." And she saw suddenly that he was thinking of her not as some one who belonged to this city but as a foreigner who had never seen it before. It was *his* city now and she was a stranger.

CHAPTER XVII

IT was after ten o'clock when Janie Fagan awakened, slowly, aware that she was in her own room but not quite certain where she had been the night before or what had happened to her. Slowly and uncertainly she remembered that last night there had been an opening and that the papers would be full of notices and then that she had not been alone in her flat and that she was as good as married to Philip Dantry. Slowly she began to feel lazy and voluptuous and happy and strangely free of the nervousness that always attacked her on the morning after a first night. But Philip was not in the room and she experienced a quick sudden fright lest he had risen early and changed his mind and had gone away never to see her again. She thought that perhaps she had lost him by being too bold; and then almost at once she heard him cleaning his teeth in the bath-room, and she knew he hadn't escaped and was filled suddenly with the most profound feeling of tenderness toward him . . . a feeling that was strange and exciting because she had never before experienced it.

Lying back on the pillows with her arms behind her head, she smiled at the ceiling and feeling content wondered where he had got the toothbrush, and then it occurred to her that he must have gone out himself to get it or have sent Victoria, the maid from Harlem. Knowing him, she saw that he cared so much for cleanli-

ness and order and neatness, he could not begin a day without having brushed his teeth, and, remembering his shyness, she saw that he had risen before her and gone into the bath-room to dress, and suddenly other memories took possession of her and she saw Douglas Kane walking about showing off his figure like a peacock and old Livingstone who had no shame or delicacy about exhibiting his dreadful misshapen body and she experienced a new sense of repulsion more horrible than she had ever known in her actual relations with either of them. She abhorred them both and felt a blind desire to kill them, because they were filthy and vain and bestial and had soiled her. Beside them Philip seemed gentle and beautiful and clean and shining, and suddenly she, Janie Fagan, who had never asked help of any one, felt a sudden desire to weep because she had deceived him and because the other two had soiled her, and it occurred to her shrewd brain suddenly that she was in love with Philip and that deep down under all her hardness she must have been in love with him all along without knowing it. She knew it now. The very sound of his teeth being brushed filled her with this strange happiness and desire to serve him. It was odd, she thought, that wanting to abase yourself and serve a person should make you happy. It seemed to her that she could never do enough to make up to him for the deception she had practised. And the memory of the night before when he had been so romantic and gentle and shy touched her with a beauty she had not imagined. She thought with astonishment, "There must be people in the world who love each other like that," and she was

envious of all the beauty and happiness which had been spoiled for her, and then frightened lest she wouldn't be able to preserve the deception she had practised and protect the illusion which made Philip happy. She experienced the most horrible fear and shame and suddenly she began almost hysterically to ask God to help her to deceive Philip forever and to keep others from shattering his illusion. She had to keep him young and happy no matter what happened. It was the most terrifying emotion because in it she felt herself lost and groping, and for the first time it seemed to her that she did not know what it was she wanted and that the control of life itself had slipped out of her hands. At the same time, somewhere in the back of her mind, occurred the thought, "I know now how Marguerite Gauthier felt. Now I could play *La Dame aux Camelias.*"

At the same moment Philip came in from the bath-room, on tiptoe so as not to waken her and the sight of him, looking so clean and healthy and masculine filled her again with happiness. She didn't say anything because she was afraid to speak lest she should repeat one of the boring and histrionic speeches she had made the night before. She was afraid that her own voice would sound shamefully false. She just smiled at him, and for the first time in her life it was a smile that was not part of a performance. There was genuine happiness in it and even apology. She was asking him to forgive something which he could not forgive because he did not know what it was.

He came over to her and kissed her and said, "Are you happy, darling?" For an answer she put her arm about

his neck and, hugging him to her, kissed him again and again. There was passion in the kiss but not the passion of the body. She was trying to tell him what she could not tell him in words, because words would betray her, that she adored him and was grateful to him and loved him and that in a way he had saved something in her which was almost dead. She gave herself up voluptuously to the emotion and after a moment, holding his head between her small pretty hands and looking into his eyes, she asked, "You aren't shocked with me? You aren't ashamed of me because I asked you to stay?"

For an answer he kissed her again and looked so happy that she could have no doubts. She said, "It was because I loved you so much," and while she was speaking she saw that when she had said the same thing the night before it had not been true and that now it was true.

He stroked her dark hair and said, "The papers are here and the maid says breakfast is ready." He blushed and said, "I don't know what she thought when she came on me suddenly in the hall."

Janie laughed, "She didn't think anything. Victoria just takes things like that for granted."

"But it's different with you."

"Yes, . . . of course. But Victoria just thinks the white folks live like that. She's told me so. She thought there was something queer about me because I never had a man about."

"She won't tell other maids?"

"Not if I ask her not to. Anyway, it won't make any difference if we're being married to-day."

His face grew serious, "No, only I wouldn't like people to be talking about you."

"I'll tell Victoria that we were married yesterday. She'll never know the difference. She can't read or write." She looked at him again and something in his honest good-looking face and the clear blue eyes filled her with a strange emotion compounded of love because he was gentle and beautiful, and pity because he was so guileless, and respect because he was finer than she could ever be, and she said, "I love you, dearest. I'm happy for the first time in my life." She thought it was as if a door had been opened showing her a whole new world.

He said suddenly, "Who shall we have as witnesses?"

"I hadn't thought about that . . . I suppose I'd like to have Mary Willetts, the girl who's playing with me. And you?"

"I'd like to have a man called Jim Whittaker. We went to college together. We learned to fly together when we thought we were going to get into the war. We rowed in the same boat at Harvard."

"We'd better get our day started. There's a lot to do." She sat up in bed and asked suddenly, "Have you read the notices? Are they good?"

"I haven't read them. I thought maybe you'd not want me to see them before you did."

It struck her as wonderful that he had guessed how she felt about the notices. How could he have known that she hated any one to see them before herself?

"That's true," she said. "You're wonderful, Philip."

2

Victoria served the breakfast, beaming all the while with a look of rich and sympathetic comprehension in her eye. She was not shocked, any more than Octavia would have been shocked, for she was like Octavia the victim of a romantic nature, and for a long time she had been asking herself and her friends in Harlem why it was a pretty girl like Miss Janie hadn't any admirers, at least not any real admirers but only gentlemen who called on her and went away at nights. Victoria was a large and very black negress from Georgia and by choice she had always worked among people who had something to do with Broadway because in that world life was exciting and you always had wonderful stories to bring back with you to One Hundred Thirty-fifth Street. Once she had saved a woman who was her mistress from being choked to death by a Mexican lover. She had seen crap games in which hundreds of thousands were lost and won. She had been in court as a witness in a celebrated murder case and she had seen a woman jump out of the window on the seventh floor of the Grand Alcazar Hotel. All these things made life interesting and added to her prestige among her own people. For nearly three years now she had no big story to take back to Harlem and in her heart she was beginning to despair. She even considered leaving the service of so quiet and respectable a lady as Miss Janie in order to seek a background more colorful. And now, when she had almost decided to quit Miss Janie, romance came along and Victoria's interest in life suddenly

mounted many degrees. With Victoria it was an emotion close to that of a worried mother who has suddenly got a daughter off her hands.

The two lovers were scarcely happier than Victoria. By every word and sign it was clear that she approved of Mr. Dantry and thought Miss Janie a lucky girl. She managed to find a dozen excuses to come into the room and to hover around the table during breakfast, until at last Janie said, "That'll be all, Victoria. Bring me the papers and you can clear away when I call you."

She brought the papers and Janie, overcome with a sudden fear of opening them and finding that her notices were bad, laid them on the side of the table. If they were bad she would at least be alone when she read them.

Philip rose and said, "I'd better get started with all the things I have to do. I'll come back for you at lunch time and we can go to Greenwich after lunch."

She asked him not to get her an expensive ring, because it seemed to her in an obscure way that she could thus atone a little for the deception. She said, "I don't want an engagement ring at all and just the simplest of wedding rings." But she knew too that in his happiness he would buy her the handsomest of rings.

He kissed her again and then went into the hallway to put on his coat and hat. She followed him there and as he kissed her good-by, she held his hands and said suddenly, "You'll never leave me, Philip, whatever happens?"

He laughed. "No, never. But why do you ask me that?"

"I don't know. I just want us to go on being happy . . .

always . . . as happy as I've been since last night. I don't think I've ever been happy before."

"Of course I won't leave you."

He went out the door and she followed him, standing at the top of the stairs as if she had been the most guileless of young brides. She stayed there until she heard the door close two flights below and then walked slowly back, smiling, into the sitting-room. She rang the bell for Victoria to clear away and, seating herself before the fire, lighted a cigarette and took up the papers, thinking suddenly, how odd it was that for the first time in her life something had interested her more than reading her notices. She didn't even hasten to open the papers but sat thinking about Philip. She felt Victoria prowling about in the background, finding things to do which would keep her in the room, and she knew that Victoria was feverish with a desire to discuss Philip. She felt so happy and so filled with a desire to talk about him that she said suddenly, "You must congratulate me, Victoria," and Victoria, with the bars now down came over and stood beaming with the coffee percolator still in her hand.

"Sure, Miss Janie, ah do congratulate yuh. Ah never seen a handsomer looking young man. It ain't many girls does as well for theirselves. Ah've seen a lotta girls and a lotta o' their fellas but ah never seen anybody so fascinatin' as him. Ah must say you kep' him waitin' around a good bit."

"How'd you know I kept him waitin'?"

"Octavia tole me. She's bin sayin' for months that yuh otta taken up with him sooner. Men like him ain't

hangin' roun' on trees. And ah kin see he's rich too and a gentleman. You can tell, Miss. They has little ways. You kin tell if the'se gentlemen or no. If ah ain't presumin' ah'd advise yuh to get him to marry yuh."

"We got married yesterday."

Victoria's dark face grew darker with disappointment for she had wanted something less prosaic than marriage. But she pulled herself together and said, "Well, ah do congratulate yuh on gettin' such a gentlemen. It ain't always us wimmen has such luck." She gave the coffee percolator a wipe with her apron and added, "An' ah always says if you're gonna have a man aroun' de house, you otta have a real man and not one of them puny little things. And you otta have a handsome man and git some satisfaction outa bein' married. Ah certainly congratulates yuh, Miss Janie. In all my experience ah never seen a finer man than that Mr. Dantry."

But in her heart of hearts Victoria hadn't given up the idea of seeking a new place because if Miss Janie was married, like as not she'd be more respectable than ever, at least for a year or two, and there wouldn't be any hope of excitement. She saw that Miss Janie had picked up the papers and begun to read. She gave the percolator another wipe and went on about her work.

3

Janie saw at once that she hadn't made an overwhelming success. The notices were about as usual. The critics who liked her were kind and the ones who didn't were cold. The play appeared to be mediocre. The critic who ad-

mired her chastely wrote cutely as usual, *"That roguish little imp Janie Fagan is back again, this time in a piece unworthy of her talents."* Janie read that over twice but it didn't give her any pleasure. She was tired of his indiscriminate praise and suddenly she loathed the author of it, seeing him for the first time in relation to Philip as a gossipy little man whom she had flattered all these years and whom she really detested. It appeared that the thing which had happened between her and Philip had the power of changing everything.

One by one she read the reviews saving for the last that of the man who she told herself had always disliked her and wrote as if he had a grudge against her. She kept putting it off but in the end she had to read it, and she read, *"Miss Fagan understands the rôle. She has seen all the way round it. In all the details her performance is perfect."*

She thought suddenly with a flash of satisfaction, "I've proved at last that he's wrong and he's admitting it."

She read on, *"But she has not seen inside it. Her performance for all its perfection of detail is hollow as a marble pillar is sometimes hollow with the core made of sticks and rubbish instead of marble. It is a shrine complete and ready in which no fire has ever been lighted."*

She threw the paper into the fire and, rising, began to pace the room in anger and then slowly as the pacing wore off the edge of her bad temper began to see despite herself that perhaps he was right. She saw that all she had ever done was created out of her head and that her heart had played no part in it. She saw that even while she was

playing and saying lines her mind sometimes wandered off to other things. She saw that this woman she was playing, who was so unhappy that she attempted to kill herself, was something she had thought out and not something she had felt. She had acted it the way she thought a woman under such circumstances would try to act, but she had acted it without understanding. Perhaps, she thought, he is right. Perhaps that's why I'm a popular actress and why the world never thinks of me as a great actress. Yet I'm far better than most of them.

She saw for the first time that she had never really understood the parts she had played. She had been reciting pieces all along, showing off in front of an audience. Until last night nothing real had ever happened to her and that was why she had never known until now what it meant to be happy.

She went back to the fire to recover the paper, but it was already burned to cinders. Standing before the fire she thought, "Maybe I can be great yet. Maybe Philip can teach me."

She saw that he wasn't brilliant or clever. No matter how much she loved him she couldn't deceive herself about that. But she saw that he had something else which to her was perhaps more precious. She couldn't say exactly what it was that she had discovered in him and in herself during the darkness of the night, but it seemed to be compounded of reality and gentleness and simplicity and honesty. Certainly it was something she had never before encountered.

She sat down before the fire again and fell to thinking of

him and how long she sat there she did not know but she was roused presently by Victoria coming in from market. She had her arms filled with packages and in one hand she held the *Daily Record* its first page entirely covered by the photograph of some woman beneath a huge headline, NIGHT CLUB SINGER STRANGLED IN EXCLUSIVE MURRAY HILL LOVE NEST.

"I got some awful news, Miss Janie. Rosa Dugan's dead. Somebody choked her to death in her flat. Mrs. Turner's Annie read it to me while I was waitin' at Reeves."

She put down the packages of rice and spinach and coffee and handed the paper to Janie. Her eyes sparkled with excitement.

"Ah know the gal that worked for her. It was mah own cousin Minerva. Minerva's the dotter of Reverend Enoch Fisher, and it was Minerva that discovered the corpse. Ah know all about it, Mis' Janie. Minerva tole me the whole story. It seems Miss Rosa had a gentleman friend who was rich. Ah can't remember his name exactly but it was somethin' lak Wilson. And Miss Rosa was double crossin' him with another fella. Minerva says his name was Tony and he was Eytalian. It never does no good doublecrossin' a man that's good to yuh. Ah always say that, Miss Janie. Never doublecross a man that's good to yuh."

Janie caught a little of Victoria's excitement but she did not hear all that she said for Victoria kept talking on and on, charged with excitement.

"Ah'll tell you all about it as soon as ah kin see Minerva. Jes' think of it, Miss Janie . . . poor Minerva comin' in to

clear up in the mornin' jes lak she's always done and findin' her lady dead in bed—astrangled to death. It's jes lak me comin' in here and findin' you all choked blue in de face. Ah seen a man once who'd hung himself down in Georgah. He was all blue en de corpsiest lookin' corpse ah ever seen."

A new burst of excitement overtook her. "Jes think, like as not Minerva'll have to appear in court for a witness, sittin' up dere in de box with everybody lookin' at her like she was the mos' important woman there was. Ah was a witness onct, Miss Janie. It was a case where a woman jumped out of a winda. Ah guess ah tole you about that. It was that hussy that jumped out of the Grand Alcazar. Ah seen her jump and ah proved that she jumped herself and wahn't pushed out by her boy frien'."

Janie went on looking at the paper. On the front page there was a picture of Rosa Dugan sitting on a table with her knees crossed, and under it there was a line which read, "Story on pages two and three." She turned the page and there began to read about the "murder in love nest. Famous singer, toast of the town, found strangled amid wreckage of bed-room. Cap and shirt studs only clue of police."

There was very little to the story. Miss Minerva Fisher, colored, of 1047 West One Hundred Thirty-fifth Street, the general maid of Miss Dugan, had arrived as usual at eight forty-five to clean the flat and prepare Miss Dugan's breakfast. She found the door of the flat unlocked and open, and inside on the floor lay a soiled cap of the sort worn

by gangsters, an empty whiskey bottle and a white satin gown belonging to Miss Dugan which had been torn into bits. The door between the bed-room and sitting-room had been forced open. The lock was broken and the wood splintered. On the bed, clad only in a pink satin wrapper trimmed with marabout, lay the body of Miss Dugan. Her hands had been crossed on her breasts and a rosary placed in one of them.

The police in trying to reconstruct the crime had established the fact that she had been strangled. Her throat bore the imprints of the strangling fingers. She had fought for her life because the tips of her pink varnished finger nails were stained with blood. It was believed that she had scratched her assailant and that the face of the murderer bore the marks of her nails. The motive could not have been robbery because there were eight diamond bracelets of great value still on one arm of the body. The police leaned toward a theory of assault.

The cap found on the floor bore inside it the address of a cheap Ninth Avenue haberdashery.

In the next room the most contradictory evidence had been found in the form of two shirt studs, each composed of a small emerald surrounded by chip diamonds, and a collar, size sixteen, with the mark of a well-known and fashionable firm of gentlemen's outfitters. The puzzling element lay in the connection or the contradiction between the soiled cap from the Ninth Avenue haberdashery and the collar and the expensive shirt studs found on the piano in the sitting-room. From the condition of the parlor it is believed that some one, probably the man who owned the

studs and collar, passed a part of the night on the divan there. The evidence led the police to believe that two men rather than one are implicated in the affair. It was pointed out that the shattered door was of solid old-fashioned oak construction and not a flimsy modern apartment house door, and that it required a man of great physical strength to have forced it open, breaking the lock and shattering the panels.

"The police," continued the story, "are endeavoring to identify the man known as 'Mr. Wilson' with whom the dead singer is known to have been friendly for the past year. They are fairly certain that Wilson is not his real name and that he is well known in Park Avenue and sporting circles. A brother of the dead woman, Patrick Healy, of 2798 Primrose Place, Corona, who is employed as doorman of a fashionable Sutton Place apartment house, has been notified. The police believe that he will be able to provide clues of much value. The maid, Minerva Fisher, fell into a hysterical state on discovering the body and from her the police have been unable to learn anything of value, save that she kept referring to 'a little black man' or an Italian who had suddenly begun to pay visits to the dead singer's flat about two months ago. The police hold one theory: That the soiled cap may have been left behind by the 'little black man' and the studs and collar by the mysterious 'Mr. Wilson.'

"The 'love nest,' it is pointed out, exists on fashionable and conservative Murray Hill, a district hitherto unconnected with crimes of this nature. The flat of the dead singer occupied the third floor. The flat underneath is leased

by a tenant at present in California and the ground floor is occupied by a furniture shop which closes at seven o'clock in the evening. It is believed there was no one in the house when the murder occurred. The police are inclined to fix the hour of the crime as the early morning. It is known that Miss Dugan left her night club between one and two o'clock accompanied by the mysterious Mr. Wilson."

The rest of two pages were devoted to the history of Rosa Dugan so far as it was known. Despite even the efforts of a hack reporter to fill in the missing gaps with colorful and purely imaginative episodes, her story remained incomplete and mysterious, as if there were in it some element beyond the grasp and the understanding either of reporters or police. There were three other photographs of the murdered woman, a plan of the two rooms showing the disposition of the cap, body, whiskey bottle, collar, shirt studs and shattered door.

4

When Victoria had talked herself out and, still palpitating with envy of Minerva Fisher, had betaken herself with her bundles into the kitchenette, Janie leaned back in the chair with the papers on her knees, thinking that it was only three nights ago that she had sat with Philip at Rosa's Place listening to Rosa Dugan sing. She saw her again, sitting carelessly in the circle of light, singing languidly, "Diamond bracelets Woolworth doesn't sell, Baby." Poor thing, she had the diamond bracelets Woolworth didn't sell. The police found them still glittering on her arm. It was odd and shocking to think that she was dead and

wouldn't sing any more. She wouldn't sing, "A Broadway Butterfly" and "Little Painted Lady, with Your Lovely Clothes." The whole story seemed too complete and too ironical. And then when Janie thought about her singing, she wondered suddenly if Rosa Dugan had some intimation of her end. Perhaps that was why she could take the most banal and sloppy songs and transform them into a kind of bitter reality in which you believed. Perhaps she understood them. Certainly her performance was not "a shrine complete and ready in which no fire had ever been lighted." It was ragged and unprofessional and casual and redeemed only by the intense feeling that lay beneath it. And suddenly it occurred to Janie that perhaps the clue to everything lay in "the little black man" who had disappeared leaving behind his dirty cap. Maybe Rosa Dugan felt about him the way she was feeling now about Philip. It made her feel faint and ill to think that anybody so handsome and so full of vitality as Rosa Dugan could suddenly be dead. Rosa's Place wouldn't exist any more. You wouldn't go there to see people you know. It was gone already and in a day or two after the morbid idiots had satisfied their curiosity, it would be forgotten.

She was aware of a vague fear and depression. Philip seemed to her strong and safe, and whatever happened, whether she was poor, whether her career failed, even if people mocked her, she still had Philip. He was like a rock in that shifting treacherous world in which Rosa Dugan had lived and at length died.

The clock struck noon and it occurred to her that it was late and that she, Janie Fagan, who was active and ener-

getic had wasted a whole morning mooning before the fire, when she had a thousand things to do and arrange. She had to decide what to wear and for her wedding she had to call up Mary Willetts before Mary went out. She had to be well dressed not only because it was her wedding day but because cameramen would want to photograph her. The thought of the cameramen brought her back suddenly to the death of Rosa Dugan and she saw that probably they would be busy all day with the story of Rosa's murder, and then she realized suddenly that Rosa Dugan, dead, had cheated her out of all the prominence that her marriage to Philip should have brought her. Instead of being first page news their marriage would be relegated to the back pages. To-day there would be room only for Rosa Dugan and "Mr. Wilson" and "the little black man." It was the kind of news that happened once in a dozen years. Philip and she would be forgotten. Nobody would read about them.

For a moment she experienced a sudden blind exasperation that always attacked her when fate blocked her path with some obstacle which she could not overcome by sheer wilfulness, and then suddenly she did not care at all. To-day she wasn't marrying Philip for publicity or wealth or to triumph over other actresses. She was marrying Philip because he was Philip and when she began to think again of his charm and gentleness she was happy, suddenly wishing that the newspapers wouldn't even know of it and that they could go off somewhere alone where no one could find them.

She began to act again and to see herself in the rôle of a

bad woman who had been redeemed by the love of a noble man. She chose a pale gray dress and put on a very pale make-up, thinking as she regarded herself in the mirror that it made her look frail and spiritual.

As she regarded herself, turning her head this way and that, she was aware suddenly of a slight thickness just beneath the chin where the line of her famous throat had always before been perfectly clean and straight. After the first shock she told herself that what she saw existed merely in her imagination, but after examining herself more closely she saw that the plumpness was no illusion. It existed. In time it would mar her beauty. In time she could no longer thrust out her chin to exhibit the beautiful line of the throat that fascinated so many matinée patrons. People wouldn't say any longer that she looked like Duse. Panic-stricken, she thought, "Philip will discover that I'm older than he thinks I am. I can't keep it back, in spite of everything I do," and then, "But they say men in love don't notice such things. Perhaps if I can keep him blind about me he'll never notice. In any case a beauty specialist can take it away."

But the panic would not die out. The menace of a double chin slowly became enormous and overwhelming, shutting out all other anxieties, corroding her good humor and annihilating at last even her feeling of happiness and affection for Philip. She saw the chin growing plumper and plumper. She was thirty-five now and in another ten years she would be plump and grotesque and couldn't any longer play romantic rôles, for who could be convinced romantically by a woman who was fat. She would have

to begin all over again and learn character parts which would have really to be acted, or she would have to play mother rôles. People would say that she was on the shelf and finished. She would look like—like her own mother.

This sudden thought filled her with a baffled sullen anger that fate had chosen to make her the daughter of Mrs. Wilbur Everhardt. Until this moment she had forgotten her mother altogether, as if she had not existed, and now suddenly she began to see her in relation to Philip. She asked herself what Philip would think of her when he met her—this fat stupid woman with a small town heart and mind, gossiping, and rocking all day on the front porch, knowing nothing of what went on in the world, interested only in the pettiest small town scandals and in the trash she read in the popular magazines. Certainly Philip would have to meet her one day and, seeing her, he might begin to see his own wife in a new light which growing brighter and brighter might in the end disillusion him completely. She couldn't keep the marriage secret because her mother would be certain to hear of it in time from the newspapers.

She had never had any love for the mother who had always spoiled her and now she began to feel a positive hatred for this woman whom fate had wished upon her. She hated her for being alive and creating a problem. She hated her for always having been a drag upon her career and for being always there in Cordova, clad in a wrapper, rocking away her fat life. You could send her money regularly and write her a letter once a month but you couldn't rid yourself of her. She was always there, clinging to you, just because she was your mother. She saw

that she couldn't pretend that her mother was dead because that created only more deception which Philip would one day be certain to discover, and the discovery might rouse his suspicions about other things. There was some power in his very honesty and simplicity which compelled you to be as honest as possible, and a person so honest and trusting could not bear disillusionment. Discovery might destroy him as well as herself and all she had gained overnight.

For the first time she was aware that this marriage had complicated her whole existence and for a moment she looked back regretfully upon a life which had been wholly free and independent in which it was necessary to deceive no one, and she began to doubt whether this strange tenderness she felt for Philip was worth giving up all the rest . . . Chilled and depressed she saw that she couldn't go on loving him with the same pleasurable abandon for the rest of her life and that even his devotion would in time grow routine and monotonous. It would wear itself out and he would begin to think more of his sport and his business than of her and she would no longer be redeemed and agreeable but would turn back again into the scheming Janie Fagan of last night. And the thought made her feel tired and disappointed that she could not always go on forever feeling as she felt on waking this morning. Why couldn't people always be as fine and as noble as they sometimes were in crises? Certainly feeling fine and noble was pleasanter than being hard and mean. But you couldn't practise nobility as a calling, devoting all your time to it, because then the novelty wore off and it became a pro-

fession, and people who were professionally noble and fine were the most tiresome people in the world, and one soon lost all respect or liking for them. And being professionally noble would occupy all your time and energy so that there would be nothing left for success or making money or doing any of the things in life which were so viciously satisfactory.

Brushing her black curls she sighed and thought, "Well, even if I grow old and fat, I'll always have Philip. I'll be rich and have a position and I can quit the stage," but she knew too that she could never quit the stage and retire to the boredom of being merely somebody's wife. She couldn't give up that life even in exchange for all the things which Philip offered her and she saw that in the end if it came to a choice she would give up Philip and everything he stood for. For a moment she doubted whether she should marry him at all, for in a burst of honesty she saw that she was not marrying him forever, believing that they would be happy and successful, but wildly and because she was ambitious, hoping merely that the whole thing would last as long as possible. She did not see them married and together in old age. She had not consciously looked beyond the first year or two and all the while in her heart she had known that she had never thought of marrying him to make him happy for the rest of his life. In her heart she had been thinking that when worst came to worst she could get rid of him and get from him a fat sum of money.

"Perhaps," she thought, "I ought not to marry him at all. Perhaps I ought to say to him, 'It's no good. I'm

rotten and selfish and I'm not what you think I am. I won't marry you.'" It would be better if he could be her lover until they grew tired of each other, better if they could go on for weeks or months or perhaps years as they had been last night. But she saw that with Philip such a thing was impossible and that if she proposed it she would be destroying the illusion of Janie Fagan which he loved and would be revealing the real Janie Fagan in all her shameless nakedness. She knew that he believed they would be married forever and would grow old together and have children and a pleasant life, and all the time she knew that none of these things could ever happen and that the Janie Fagan of an hour ago was already dead.

She felt tired and ill and wished for the first time in all her life that she could have had more heart and less cold intelligence. Even her own fat mother was happier than she was. When she thought of Philip with his gentleness and respect, she wanted suddenly to cry, and felt a sudden wild impulse to go to him and tell him everything and ask him to take her away and save her, but this mood passed quickly and she saw coldly that nothing could save her. In spite of everything she could do she would marry him and make him unhappy and in the end come away herself untouched, because she was too old now to change. The past had fastened itself on her. Janie Fagan was Janie Fagan and nothing could change her now.

In a kind of despair she thought, "I will forget how good and charming he is, and love him like most women for the sake of his beauty and his body. I'll kill everything else and maybe that will make me happier." But even by

doing that, she saw that she might be laying a trap for herself which in the end would destroy her. And last of all she saw that even loving him in the grossest fashion was not possible because she was cold and the pleasures of the body meant less to her than ambition.

Presently she was aware of her reflection in the mirror and saw that she looked tired and worn and terror took possession of her. She saw that she must forget everything else and care for herself. She dared not worry or be unhappy and she must go more regularly to a beauty specialist. In the back of her mind she began to see again the yellowed photographs of her mother as a young girl and saw suddenly that she looked for all the world like her mother and that in ten years she too might be fat and gross unless she fought with all her strength.

She put her hair in order and then went to the telephone and called Mary Willetts to ask her to stand as witness to her marriage with Philip Dantry.

CHAPTER XVIII

SAVINA wakened late, aware that she was not rested because her sleep had been disturbed by dreams and nightmares of which only one remained a reality. She remembered having heard some one scream—a curious terrifying scream which seemed more terrible to her now when she thought of it in cold blood than it had seemed at the time. She remembered having risen to see that Alida was all right and she remembered having

seen a light on the third floor of the house on the opposite side of St. Bart's churchyard. It all returned to her with a remarkable clarity although she made no effort to rearrange or coordinate the events. People screamed. Sometimes women screamed over nothing and sometimes they screamed simply out of rage during a quarrel with a man or they screamed merely to attract attention to themselves. New York was full of screams. All sorts of things went on behind the walls of houses and flats all about you. If you were disturbed by screams life could become very distracted.

And her mind was filled with thoughts of Hector. She kept thinking about him when her breakfast arrived and while she ate it, sitting in her man's wrapper and felt slippers with the sun streaming in at the window. Here in the sanctity of her own room she could let herself go. Her small feet, muffled in shapeless slippers, her hair done tight in old-fashioned metal curlers. The two dogs returning from their morning walk with the funereal Henry came in frisking and barking with the crisp snow still clinging to them. Savina greeted them and still continued to think of Hector and of Nancy, and as she thought of them she kept slipping back, like an old, old woman, into the past. Presently she forgot Hector and Nancy and at the thought of her coming back to this very house to tea, she experienced something of the excitement of a little girl over her first party. It would make them all young again to have Nancy there, so pretty and gay and amusing; and then she remembered that of course it wouldn't be the same as it had once been because Patrick Dantry wouldn't

be able to come too. He was dead and buried in the ice of a glacier in Switzerland, and of course the Nancy who came to tea wouldn't be the same Nancy who had come to tea twenty-five years ago. She saw that the Nancy she had been thinking of was thirty-five and marvelously beautiful and spirited, and the Nancy who was coming to tea must be nearly sixty, possibly a pretty withered old lady like Alida with arthritis. She was the sort of woman who was more fascinating at forty than at twenty, but it was impossible that she should be anything now but an old lady. The Nancy who had come day after day to meet Patrick Dantry in the drawing-room had gone forever.

Savina spread honey on a piece of hot buttered toast and, lifting the fragrant coffee to her lips, was aware again suddenly and after many years of the strange pleasure it had given her to help Nancy and Patrick in their affair. It was a pleasure the like of which she had never known before or since which must, she thought, be very near to the pleasure that Nancy herself felt in her love for Patrick —as near, Savina thought sadly, as any one could approach it who had never known love directly, in its essence. She wasn't sorry that she had helped to break up Malcolm Carstairs' home by aiding his wife to elope with another man. She wasn't sorry that she had quarreled with Hector about the whole affair, so seriously that for three years, he would not see her nor speak to her. Looking back from this great distance she saw now, with the clarity and understanding of a worldly old woman, that it hadn't been the scandal which had upset Hector so much as his jealousy of Patrick Dantry. She saw now that he had loved

Patrick Dantry, and then ironically his own two sisters had in turn taken Patrick from him, and she, Savina, had helped them. It was odd that a charming upstart like Patrick Dantry, a wag and a professional fascinator, should so have disrupted a stolid and respectable family like the Champions. She saw too that Hector had been furious because in the love of Nancy and Patrick he had been forced to witness something stronger than himself, stronger than any of them, which neither money nor threats nor pleadings had been of any use. She thought, feeling suddenly warm with virtue, that she herself had been far more generous, and that in the face of this spectacle of nature from which she was herself excluded, she had been noble and generous and had found an exciting pleasure in bringing the process to its natural climax. For it was biology after all; Patrick and Nancy had been drawn to each from the beginning like the iron and the magnet, and when such a thing happened, it was wrong to stand in the way. Because their love for each other had been something stupendous and overwhelming and not a silly idle vain affair like Fanny Towner's intrigue with that man Melbourn. And she thought that if Alida could ever imagine all the unconventional thoughts that were passing through her head, she would never feel the same toward her again, but then Alida was a chill little piece, as pretty and cold as a lovely icicle, who could never imagine such things as had passed between Patrick and Nancy. She could never imagine a woman being swept into folly by love. And Alida was a snob, because even while she sat reading the newspapers in search of divorce cases and

crimes of passion, she believed profoundly that such things never happened to well-bred people like themselves but only to lower class people who weren't well brought up and didn't know how to behave. She had never forgiven Nancy because she had betrayed her class and proved that Alida was wrong. Alida would say of course that Patrick didn't matter because he wasn't a gentleman and never had been. No, Alida wouldn't even admit that her own niece, Fanny, might be mixed up with a man like Melbourn. She just became angry and denied the slightest hint of such goings-on.

And suddenly Savina felt all warm and superior to Hector and Alida because she had been on the side of nature and they in their puny ways had tried to prevent such things, like a pair of ants attempting to halt the progress of a steam roller. She saw that even if she herself had never known love, she was better off than they were because she had been on the side of love and known it at second hand.

And when you came to the end of things, it was only love that mattered. All the rest of it—money and success and even great accomplishments were nothing if you hadn't participated in the great spectacle which was the reason for your existence. If you'd missed that, you were like a drone in a hive.

She knew now that her own love for Hector could never have come to anything and she saw that her feeling toward him was no longer one of love but was compounded of habit and a kind of maternal affection. She had known him for so long and so intimately that he had become a

charge and a responsibility. If anything happened to him it would leave a great hole in her life which could be filled by no other interest. She was much the wiser of the two and could help him if he only allowed her to.

So as she finished her coffee and lighted a cigarette and leaned back comfortably in the great armchair she began to plan what was to be done about Hector. He had, she knew, to be lifted somehow out of this depression and despair which had settled on him of late but she could not think how it was to be done, because if you went to him frankly and spoke of it, he might fly into a rage and tell you to mind your own business and then he'd be worse off than before. Poor Hector, she thought, he'd never known the gift of intimacy. He'd never known what it was to feel kindly toward the world and to have friends whom you trusted; and as he grew older he'd grow worse and worse and more and more bitter and lonely until he couldn't go to any one, not even herself nor his own nephew, Philip, for strength and sympathy. If he was really ill and perhaps dying, he'd need some one. Perhaps it was her duty to take charge of him and care for him, because Philip, who was young and concerned with other things, couldn't understand what it was like to be dying all alone and leaving behind everything you cherished. All that was still too far away for a boy like him. To think about such things at Philip's age one would have to be morbid and Philip was as far from being morbid as any one could be. He was, she thought, the nicest, stupidest and, save for his own father, handsomest man she had ever known. He'd go on working and living normally

and marrying and having a family of nice children and being nice to people and believing in them until it was time to die and when it was time to die, he'd lie down and do it respectably and without any of Hector's morbid goings-on, because death was a part of life, just like all the other things and because when it was finished it was finished and there was nothing to be done about it. No, Philip could never even imagine how a complex tortured person like Hector would feel about dying. It was better to be like Philip than to possess the most painful and erratic intelligence.

The more she thought about how she was to help Hector, the more she saw that she must first of all find out whether he was really ill or whether he was just up to his old trick of imagining that he had this or that disease. She knew that she couldn't ask him, so there remained but one way. She would go to Doctor MaClellan and ask him. They'd both known Andrew MaClellan all their lives and if she explained to him why it was she wanted to know the truth about Hector, he'd understand and not have any ethical nonsense about it. She suspected that perhaps he even knew how she had felt about Hector for so long. She'd go this very afternoon to his office.

The clock struck the half hour and, turning, she saw with horror that it was already half-past eleven and that in all her life she had never sat so late in a wrapper and she remembered that she had a meeting of the Board of Directors of St. Anne's hospital at which it was to be decided whether or not they were to build a special maternity ward to care for cases of unmarried girls because

sometimes the married women (very smugly, she thought) objected to being placed in the same ward with hussies. And that made her think again how mean and uncharitable most of her own sex was and how in their hearts they were always doing their best to get husbands by any means possible and when they got them to do their best to keep other women from getting husbands. And the old desire to be a man, and to possess a man's freedom and directness and simplicity took possession of her.

She rose heavily and rang for Lizzie to help her get into her corsets and put her tiny shoes on her small pretty feet, and, seating herself before her dressing-table, she took out the steel curlers and brushed and fluffed out her skimpy meager hair because she wanted to look well when she called on Doctor MaClellan whom she hadn't seen in two or three years.

2

In half an hour she was dressed and, wrapped in the enormous sable coat, she came into the drawing-room to say good-morning to Alida. The sun was streaming in the big bow window from St. Bart's churchyard, and Alida, dressed in a pretty soft gray dress that made her with her white hair look like a Nattier marquise, was standing on the platform with her back to the room looking out. Coming into the room from the dark hall, Savina was blinded for an instant by the rush of brilliant winter sunlight, and then slowly she saw that Alida had pulled back a corner of the curtain and was peering discreetly out of the window at the back of the house opposite. Worse

than that she was not only peering but peering through a pair of mother-of-pearl opera glasses. A dozen newspapers lay scattered about the floor at her feet. From the untidy look of the newspapers Savina knew at once that there must have been a new and exciting murder.

As she reached the middle of the room, she said, "For Heaven's sake, Alida, what *are* you doing?"

For a moment Alida didn't answer and then, without turning, she said, "I see the policeman," and at the same time Savina, looking down at the scattered newspapers, saw on one of them the photograph of a woman sitting on a table with her legs crossed, which covered the whole of the first page and above it the headline, NIGHT CLUB SINGER STRANGLED IN EXCLUSIVE MURRAY HILL LOVE NEST, and she thought, "Good. Alida will be in a good temper to-day." And suddenly she saw that "Murray Hill" meant the spot where this very house stood. She was standing on Murray Hill. And she wondered how a love nest even on Murray Hill could be exclusive.

Then Alida turned and said, "There was a woman murdered in the house on the other side of the churchyard." Her face was flushed and her pretty eyes shining with excitement. She pointed out of the window, "Just over there. On the third floor. She was a night club singer."

She began to tell the whole story which she had read in the papers and Savina, listening to her but also overcome with curiosity, took the opera glasses from her hand and went to the window. Pushing back the curtain discreetly, she raised the glasses and saw that one of the win-

dows on the third floor of the house was open and slowly she realized that it was this window which had been lighted the night before when she was awakened by a scream and went to see if Alida was all right and that the window was now open because there was a corpse in the room. Through the glasses she was able to see into it. There was a policeman sitting there buttoned up in his uniform and greatcoat. He was red haired and red faced and as she watched she saw him suddenly cross himself and take up a whiskey bottle from the table and, tilting it up, drink the last of the whiskey that remained in the bottle. And seeing him crossing himself made her see something else—that there must be lying on the bed beside him the body of the murdered woman, and she thought, "That is the woman who screamed. She screamed for help. She was being murdered and I did nothing about it."

She heard Alida behind her saying, "She was strangled to death," and she thought, "I let her be strangled without doing anything, and if I'd been in a small town and some one screamed for help in the next house, I'd have gone to her and done something."

The policeman had seated himself again and was lighting a cigarette. She turned away from the window, still aware that Alida was talking and still hearing everything she said.

At sight of her, Alida asked, "What's happened? What did you see?" because Savina looked pale and shaken.

"I didn't see anything. But I heard that woman scream.

It waked me up last night. I didn't know where it came from, and I didn't do anything about it."

But Alida's quick ferrety mind didn't react as Savina's had done. She didn't think at all about the woman. She said, "You must tell the police that. It'll help them to fix the time of the murder." And, without stopping, Alida went on with her story, telling about the mysterious "Mr. Wilson" who had left behind a collar and a pair of emerald shirt studs.

"I've a feeling," she said, "that he's somebody we know and that we'll all be surprised when it comes out."

Listening to her, Savina thought suddenly for no reason at all, "It's Jim Towner," and suddenly remembered that she'd heard Jim Towner was mixed up with a night club singer. But she couldn't say what she thought because Jim Towner was a gentleman and married to Alida's niece and if she said such a thing, Alida would fly into a temper.

Weakly she said, "Maybe, but the newspapers aren't always right about who's fashionable. Everybody who lives on Park Avenue isn't smart. They just love to use the word 'fashionable.'"

But Alida clung to the theory with the passion of an artist who felt that without this one fact the full beauty of the story would be spoiled. The mysterious "Mr. Wilson" must be a "fashionable club man" to make it complete and perfect.

"What was the woman's name?" asked Savina.

"Rosa Dugan. She had a night club called 'Rosa's Place.'"

At the sound of the name "Rosa's Place" on the lips of Alida, Savina wanted suddenly to laugh hysterically because the picture of Alida in relation to a night club was so funny. But she only said, "I'm going to a meeting of St. Anne's board and I'm late already. I've asked for lunch at a quarter to two. Will you wait?"

"Yes," said Alida, "I think they'll find out who 'Mr. Wilson' really is before to-night. They seem to have a great many clues." And impatiently she went back to the window with the opera glasses, filled with a shamed and morbid hope that if she did not abandon her post she might see them taking away the body of Rosa Dugan.

Savina left the room and went through the hall out into the shining snow that filled all the street, and as she stepped into the high old-fashioned motor she heard again with the most astonishing clarity, the single scream of Rosa Dugan, and thought, "It couldn't be Jim Towner who killed her. I've known him since he was a boy and he couldn't do such a thing. It simply isn't in him."

CHAPTER XIX

BY nine o'clock Jim Towner had had his breakfast, lying in bed like a delicate woman or a helpless old man, with Fanny seated by his side helping him with his toast and coffee because the arm and hand that were uninjured shook so violently that he could not raise the cup to his lips without spilling the coffee on the bedclothes. By half-past nine Doctor Barnes had come and

heard suavely his story of having fallen down an areaway during the blizzard and set the broken arm and given him something to make him sleep. And by ten o'clock he was safe in the refuge he had been seeking hungrily. He was asleep with all the fear and disgust wiped away by the drug. When Fanny came to the door to look in at him she found that with his good hand he had managed to pull the bedclothes over his head in a dazed impulse to hide himself completely. She rearranged the bedclothes and went into her own room to dress.

She did not send for her maid because she wanted to be alone and because for the first time in all her existence she was ashamed of having made a scene before servants. The sense of shame grew out of the great calm which had suddenly descended upon her. She began to think efficiently and in the most cold-blooded fashion and to see even herself with a kind of strange new detachment which puzzled her and made her uneasy. It seemed to her that with Jim asleep and out of the way in the next room the principal problem was solved and that she was now free to attack the others. She thought that if he could only remain asleep for the next month without interfering with her plans or doing some stupid thing that would ruin them all, she could manage everything, skilfully and unscrupulously. The new sense of her importance gave her a profound satisfaction. Quite suddenly she, Fanny, had become the head of the family and Jim, with all his stupidity and good-natured evasions had become merely another child who had to be cared for.

Without thinking much about it she chose to dress her-

self somberly in black, because it seemed the only appropriate color under the circumstances and because she always looked well in black; and when she had finished dressing she sent for her daughter Elizabeth before she went to take her piano lesson from Miss Kraus, because she had to see Elizabeth and the girl would think she was still asleep and must not be disturbed.

She was a big girl for her age, too tall and too heavy, and not at all like her mother but, like Jim Towner, rather muscular and large-boned without brightness and without the charm which in her father's youth had brought him everything he wanted, and because of this and because she did not care about clothes, Fanny looked upon her as a changeling who, with her love for horses and sports, was Jim's child but had no relation to Fanny herself. She had no very great interest in the child save to worry over what was to become of her when she was old enough to be launched into a society where she would not shine in competition with girls who were prettier and more feminine and cheaper and would do anything in the world to have a success with men. There were even times when Fanny, overwrought and hysterical, disliked the girl and wished that she could have been delicate looking like her brother, young Jim, who was like Fanny herself. In moments of hysteria her vanity suffered because the girl chose always to confide in her father and to husband all her affection for him. Lately she had thought at times that Elizabeth was beginning to treat her as Jim and then Melbourn had treated her, as if she were silly and frivolous and not to be considered seriously.

The girl came in now shy and awkward and ready to bolt rather like a young horse let loose in a china shop. Her face looked big and red and freckled and her reddish hair was done in an untidy knot at the back of her head. She gave her mother the morning kiss that was a ritual and an annoyance to them both and then stood awkwardly with her hands clasped, waiting while Fanny, from long habit, set her blouse straight and arranged her hair, thinking that she would have to protect Elizabeth from this scandal because the girl would have a bad enough time when she came to find a husband without having to drag her father's scandals along with her.

At last she turned away from the mirror and said abruptly, "We're all going to Europe, Elizabeth. We're sailing to-night if there's a boat."

The girl withdrew a little and asked, "What for, mama?"

"Because I've decided it's the best thing for all of us . . . especially your father. He's not been well lately and the sooner we get off the better."

Suddenly Elizabeth began to cry. "You knew I wanted to ride in the horse show. You knew I was certain to get a prize. Can't we wait until that's over? Please, mama."

Fanny's voice grew ever so little harder. "We can't wait, Elizabeth. We have to go as soon as possible."

"I think it's mean and rotten. You know it's the one thing I care about, more than anything in the world."

Fanny, watching her, scarcely heard what she was saying because she was thinking that if she put Elizabeth into a French school away from horses and such nonsense she might lose some of the rough edges and become present-

able as the daughter of Fanny Towner ought to be. She answered, "I know all about that, Elizabeth. I can't discuss it. You'll have to take my word for everything. I know better than you do and I can't explain. Some day when you're old enough to understand you'll be thankful to me for it."

"I could understand it now. I understand a lot of things. I'm not a baby. Anyway I don't see what it's all got to do with me. You could take papa with you. I wouldn't even care if he wasn't here to coach me. Aunt Alida could look after me. I'd be all right."

Fanny began suddenly to feel angry and impatient because Elizabeth didn't understand what she was going through and didn't appreciate that she must be given every consideration. She said sharply, "I haven't time to discuss it now. It has to be and don't worry me any more about it because I've got enough things to worry me already. I've sent a telegram to Doctor McIntosh to send Jim down from school to-day so that he can take a boat day after to-morrow."

"He'll hate it too. He won't want to leave school."

"There's nothing to argue, Elizabeth. It's all settled."

The girl collapsed suddenly into silence because she recognized a tone in her mother's voice which always terrified and silenced her, but she kept on crying in spite of herself because nothing in life seemed worth anything and she didn't want to live any longer. She knew that when her mother talked like that it was the beginning of a scene which might last all day and well into the night and she could face anything rather than the spectacle

of her mother crying and screaming out that her children didn't love her and treated her as if she were something to wipe their feet on. Elizabeth began hysterically to see all the shameless goings-on and hear all the old phrases and she knew that anything was better than having to be ashamed of her own mother again.

Fanny said, "Telephone Miss Kraus that you're not coming for your lesson and then begin to get things together ready to pack. Maggie will help you."

"Where are we going, mama?"

"Paris . . . London . . . Italy. I don't know. I haven't thought where."

"Will there be horses?"

"I don't know. I should think not."

Fanny went over to the desk and, turning her back on Elizabeth, began to search through the drawers. For a moment the girl watched her, wondering whether she dared risk another question. At last she said, "Are we going to be gone for long?"

"I don't know. Certainly for a year at any rate. Maybe longer."

"Oh, mama!"

"Perhaps I'll put you in school in Paris."

"I hate Paris. It's such a silly place and the French are so silly."

Fanny found what she was searching for and was able again to give her attention to Elizabeth. She took the passports out of the drawer and turned to her.

"I told you, Elizabeth, that I didn't want to discuss it any more. I know what's best for you and all of us. You're

a plain unattractive girl and you'll never get anywhere unless I can do something about you. You're hopeless and what I'm doing is for your own good. I'm tired discussing it. I've got about three years to work on you and I'll need ten. Now, go and get yourself packed, and don't say another word."

Elizabeth tried to speak but what she meant to say turned into a gulping sob and she ran out of the door. Fanny heard her sobbing uncontrollably as she ran down the hall and she thought, "Why should God have wished on me such a frump of a daughter?"

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It was all right. The visa on her passports and the children's were good for another five months, so Jim's must be good also because they had all been stamped at the same time when they all went to London. She remembered suddenly that it was on this trip that she had met Melbourn one night at dinner in the Ritz restaurant and that when she'd met him she thought him attractive, not dreaming that their acquaintance would go on and on, turning into something quite different from mere friendship. For a moment she was excited again and she saw that all of that was a thousand years away. It was as if a steel curtain had been let down between that life and the life she had begun this morning. And now she had to telephone him as if he were a man who had never been her lover and ask of him a favor as if he were a stranger, and when he heard that she wanted to speak to him he'd think she was trying to get him back again and wouldn't

talk to her. She flushed at the thought of putting herself, Fanny Towner, in such a position but she could think of no way out. Even if the police discovered before evening who "Mr. Wilson" really was, Melbourn was powerful enough to arrange it for them to get away in time and if they didn't discover the secret, Melbourn would be the only one who would be certain to keep it.

She saw suddenly that it would be no good trying to telephone him. She would have to see him or write him a note which would make him understand that she wasn't calling him because she wanted him back. First of all she'd have to get him to listen to her, and the first thing she must do was to find out where she could reach him. Then she remembered that Sir John and Nancy Elsmore were arriving and that he would probably be at the pier meeting them because Sir John was an important man.

She tried to summon courage to ring up his secretary and find out where he would be, because the secretary wouldn't know yet that when Mrs. Towner called, he was to say that Mr. Melbourn was out and was not to give any information concerning his whereabouts, but she could not bring herself to pick up the telephone and at last she thought, "I'll count five and before I reach five I'll take up the telephone." But when she looked at the instrument it seemed to her physically impossible but at the same time she saw that she had to do it. She began to count and before she had reached five she had taken it up and given the number.

Mr. Melbourn, the secretary said, was out. He had gone to the pier to meet Sir John Elsmore and he was

lunching with the Elsmores later at the Ritz. Where he would be in the interim the secretary did not know. He thought the best place to reach Mr. Melbourn was at the Ritz after one.

Flushed and feeling ashamed, she put down the telephone, thinking that it was lucky Melbourn hadn't yet given the secretary orders to keep his whereabouts secret. For a moment she sat quite still thinking that it couldn't be true that this was the last time she would ever call up his secretary and be told where she could find him. It couldn't be true that she would never again have him for her lover.

The butler brought in a pile of newspapers and left them quietly on the desk beside her and mechanically she opened one of them to look at the sailing list, terrified lest there should not be any boat by which they could escape. But it was all right; the *Paris* was sailing at midnight. If the police did not discover who "Mr. Wilson" was there would be fourteen hours in which to arrange everything before they disappeared. Everything would be all right unless Melbourn believed that they ought to stay and face the music. He would know exactly what to do.

It struck her suddenly that it was only because she had known him so well, with the intimacy of a mistress, that she was willing thus to place everything in his hands. All the others, even her own close friends and Jim's, she could not trust because now in this crisis it seemed to her that they were really strangers whom she did not know at all. She wanted to weep at the thought that everything was finished with the one person she had ever known inti-

mately, for at the moment she felt she knew Melbourn better even than she knew Jim; but when the wave of sentiment had passed and she began again to think clearly and to disentangle her mind from the instincts of her body, she began to doubt whether she had ever been intimate with him at all. She saw that she really knew nothing about him, neither what his life had been nor the kind of man he really was, and it occurred to her for the first time that perhaps she had not been loved at all but only used as he might have used any woman whom he found attractive. For one terrifying moment she wondered whether he had not taken her for want of a woman who would have pleased him better, and the idea that she had ever served as second best became insupportable. Perhaps, she told herself, he was a man quite incapable of love, composed only of ambition and sensuality, to whom even love was merely the satisfaction of a hunger which must not disturb him and block the accomplishment of things which interested him far more. It was odd that, until this morning, when she had admitted that the whole thing was finished, she had never been able to see him clearly; until now he had always been blurred and enveloped in a kind of mist with light shining through it.

As she sat there staring at the piece of note paper on the writing table the whole of the past year seemed suddenly to be falling apart into disconnected fragments and impressions, each one of which fell upon her consciousness with a cold leaden weight. In this new bitter light of reality she seemed to understand for the first time that this affair between them had never been either romantic

or beautiful but only a sensual adventure in which she had always been at a disadvantage because she was the one who cared the more and he the one who granted his good-humor, his flattery, his attentions, even himself grudgingly and with preoccupation. There was not even in the whole thing the seeds of tragedy because it lacked the dignity which must go with tragedy. He had never given her love; he had given her everything of which love was composed save tenderness and intimacy and she saw all at once that she had never been happy with him but only stimulated, excited and distracted. Without the elements which he had denied her, love was only something mechanistic and horrid which took possession of you and converted you into a kind of beast. The illusion melted away altogether and in cold blood she saw that she had humbled her pride and made of herself a fool for the sake of something which had never existed.

Because she could not go on thinking of him in this cold painful light, she took up her pen and began abruptly in her erratic emotional handwriting to compose the note she meant to send him at the Ritz. It was not an easy note to write and before it was finally achieved she had written and rewritten it many times, taking care each time to destroy the discarded drafts because they were worded in language so florid that they must not fall into the hands of any one. Twice she thought hysterically, "I can't do it. I won't do it. It is too much to ask of any woman." And no sooner had she put down the pen than a sense of the horrible net which was closing about them all overcame her once more, and she felt weak and

helpless and terrified. She saw that she was not strong enough, not ruthless enough, nor possessed of sufficient character to carry the thing through unaided. Melbourn's very coldness and lack of scruples seemed to her God-sent qualities approaching nobility. He had the character to overlook laws and conventions and scruples. She saw that to him even honor was a feeble thing conceived by the weak to salve the wounds of their defeats. To him honor was a thing you used if it could be of use to you.

And after many efforts she achieved a final draft which read:

DEAR DAVID:—

I accept our decision of last night. [It was really *his* decision, she thought, but I cannot admit that.] It's all over and I suppose we can go on being friends, whatever happens. There's nothing to discuss about it.

I'm only writing you because I am forced to. You know it isn't pleasant for me and I wouldn't do it if there were any other way out. Something awful has happened . . . as awful as anything could be. I can't cope with it myself. I don't know what to do. I have to see you to-day. *I have to,* David. The sooner the better because every minute is precious. It hasn't anything to do with beginning all over again. I swear before God that I won't even speak of that.

I shall wait at home for you to telephone when you can come or where and when I can meet you. It's a matter of life and death. If you fail me, I don't know what I'll do. I might do anything. For the sake of whatever there may have been between us once, don't let me down. FANNY.

She read it over and in cold blood it seemed to her that the note was cheap and melodramatic, but she couldn't think how it could be worded differently and still achieve its purpose, and if it was melodramatic and cheap it was because she found herself entangled in a calamity that was sordid and melodramatic and because the note had to follow the whole tone of her relationship with him. She had first to make him believe that everything was finished between them and that she called on him only because the circumstances were desperate and she had to threaten him with some desperate act because she knew that he would see her rather than have her do something which would involve him in a scandal. Her best weapon, she saw, was her oldest one, and a weapon of which she had become clearly conscious for the first time. She could threaten him with her irresponsible behavior and thus strike at his strange passion for secrecy.

While she folded the note and wrote, "David Melbourn, Esq. Urgent," she was overcome again by shame and a sense of complete unreality. The whole thing could not be true. It had never happened, and she was sealing and addressing this envelope in a nightmare. This Fanny who was sending this note was a strange Fanny who had risen suddenly out of the depths of her own character, a Fanny as strange as the Fanny who a few hours ago had lain on the bed in hysterics, planning the most shameful depravities and experiencing the most horrible desires. And that Fanny seemed dead now and never to have existed. Their new Fanny was like Melbourn him-

self who could toss into the dust his pride, his honor, and his self-respect to achieve what he had to have.

She called the butler and told him to go himself to the Ritz and leave the note with the injunction that it must be delivered the moment Mr. Melbourn arrived. She did not even think any longer of being discreet before the servants because there was no time to think things out elaborately and because she was beginning all at once to feel horribly tired.

When the man had gone away she went to Jim's door and, opening it a little way, looked in at him. She saw that for a second time in his sleep he had managed to pull the bedclothes over his head. She removed them without disturbing him and as she stood there looking down at him she again felt a sudden wave of affection for his very helplessness, and it seemed to her that she had come round the circle and was beginning all over again. They would go to Brinoë or Innsbruck or Partenkirchen or some out-of-the-way place where they could be alone and no one would know them, and her mind began to create pictures of them sitting on terraces in the sun before glittering snow-covered mountains and exploring together valleys filled with extravagant wild flowers. The more she thought of it the more romantic the prospect became, and for the first time she experienced a profound thankfulness that she had finished with Melbourn and could rest. For the first time middle age appeared to her to be pleasant and comfortable instead of a horror. And it occurred to her how fantastic it would be if Melbourn and Rosa Dugan

had been the means of bringing her and Jim together again as they had once been.

When she went back to her own room the second man was standing there with a bundle of newspapers.

"These are the later ones, Madame. Bossom thought you might want them too."

He left them on the writing table and she saw that the top one contained an enormous picture of a woman seated on a table with her knees crossed. Above the picture there was a headline which read, NIGHT CLUB SINGER STRANGLED IN EXCLUSIVE MURRAY HILL LOVE NEST, and for a moment the whole thing seemed more real and more horrible than it had ever been and she thought with terror that the servants now knew all about it, and then she saw that it was all right because the servants couldn't possibly know who "Mr. Wilson" really was. Lying on the chaise longue she began to read the whole story, lost suddenly in the grip of a complete and horrible fascination because for the first time the thing was real to her. It was all printed and in the papers like any common murder in the suburbs or on the west side.

CHAPTER XX

FOR Savina the meeting of St. Anne's Hospital Board was exactly the same as all the other meetings she had attended in all the twelve years of her service as one of its directors. The same women were there, more by virtue of their wealth or their generosity or their prestige,

than by virtue of their ability or their intelligence. It all went exactly as usual. Mrs. Prendergast, to Savina's great disgust and immense physical discomfort, insisted that they must all kneel down and open the meeting with prayer. After that was finished, Mrs. Alastair Wilson managed to confuse every issue and to drag in a dozen irrelevant topics from the care of Persian cats to the dubious morality of current plays. Each member of the board exposed her character in exactly the same light which was cast upon it at every meeting. Savina and Miss Prentice, the only unmarried women on the board were also the only women who were generous in their attitude toward the problem of unmarried mothers. Mrs. Prendergast, faithful to her reputation for snoopiness, suggested a sort of detective system by which they could pursue the careers of unmarried mothers after they left the hospital. Miss Prentice revealed a horribly advanced point of view when she advocated the legitimization of all children regardless of the circumstances of their birth. Mrs. Whitmead who had Yogi leanings delivered a long and irrelevant talk upon the beauties of separating the spirit and the flesh and subduing the one by the other, to which Savina responded somewhat tartly that in India the separation hadn't appeared to produce any notable elevation of the human race.

It went on and on until Savina, suffocating in the overheated room smelling faintly of ether and antiseptics, felt that either she herself or all the rest of the world had gone insane and these goings-on of which she was a witness could not be true. At last when it was two o'clock and

nothing had been accomplished she appointed herself steam roller of the occasion and demanded a committee of three which was to go ahead with the work. And at last the board meeting was finished and she was able to leave in the old-fashioned motor and go home to Alida and the dogs and the comfortable house and a delicious lunch, thinking all the way how detestable her own sex could be and wishing God had made her a man.

At home there was a message from Lady Elsmore saying that she would be delighted to come to tea, and Alida told her that young Philip Dantry had telephoned to ask her if he might come in for a moment about five. He had, he said, a surprise for her.

When Savina heard this, she said, "I don't know. Perhaps he hadn't better come at five."

"Why not?" asked Alida.

"On account of Nancy."

"They'll have to meet some time."

"Of course they will, but I don't know whether it's a good idea for them to see each other in a crowd."

"It'll be easier than meeting without any one. Besides, Nancy doesn't mind crowds. She's always liked being the center of everything."

They sat down to a lunch of flounder in Chablis jelly, pigeon, salad and lemon meringue pie in the big dining-room heavy and dark with mahogany woodwork and mahogany furniture. Savina said, "I wonder what Philip's surprise is to be."

"He's got himself engaged to somebody. One of these chits that nowadays pass for young ladies."

And then Savina remembered suddenly about going to see Doctor MaClellan to find out whether Hector was really ill and sent the funereal Henry to telephone at once for an appointment. Henry was to say that it was urgent and that she wouldn't need more than fifteen minutes. (If I need more, she thought, he can't turn me out.)

Then Alida brought up abruptly the subject of the murder. She said the latest editions had nothing new and that the police were still in the dark about "the little dark man" and "Mr. Wilson." Watching from the bow window she had seen them take away the body about one o'clock, but the policeman was still there sitting on the chair by the window, only they'd closed the window now that the body was gone.

In the midst of this morbid conversation Henry came in to say that Doctor MaClellan could see her if she could be there by three o'clock. Later he wouldn't be at his office.

"Tell him I'll come directly over."

She saw that Alida was watching her again, curiously, as she had done last night when she was thinking about Hector, so she said quickly, "It has nothing to do with me. I'm in excellent health. I wanted to see him about something else."

But Alida still regarded her in a hurt and suspicious fashion and Savina thought, "What am I to tell her? I can't tell her that it's on account of Hector or she'll begin to act jealous and superior again." And then immediately she saw that it was a ridiculous situation and that it was

absurd for a woman like Alida to be jealous of Hector and irritated by her (Savina's) concern for his health, as if she and Hector were still young and capable of loving each other. So aloud she said bruskly, "It's about Hector. I want to find out if he's really ill."

"Why don't you ask him?"

"Because you can't ask Hector things he doesn't want to tell you."

Alida swallowed the last bit of lemon pie which was forbidden her because of her arthritis and snorted, "That's what's the matter with him. Everybody's always treated him like that. They've kept him wrapped in cotton wool, his mother and his sisters and then you and everybody. He's never had a hard knock of any kind in all his life. If people had treated him as a human being when he was younger, he wouldn't be such an old fraud now." Savina didn't answer but looked at her watch and saw that she had ten minutes in which to drive to Doctor MaClellan's office, so she sent Henry for a taxicab because Albert the chauffeur would be eating his lunch and she didn't want to disturb him. As she rose to leave the table she saw Lizzie entering the room with her arms full of afternoon papers. The maid placed them on the table beside Alida and Savina, with a sudden swift distaste, saw Alida pounce upon them like a dog upon a bone.

2

She arrived at the office five minutes late only to be told by a stiffly starched nurse that she would have to wait, so, seating herself in a stiff chair, she tried to find some

interest in the pictures of the fashionable people she discovered in the aged magazines lying on the table, but her mind slithered off all of them save a photograph of Elizabeth Towner taken in polo costume seated on a horse and looking for all the world like Jim Towner as a boy. The picture gave her a shock because she saw suddenly that Elizabeth Towner was almost a young woman and that time had been flying past all of them. Time, she saw, really didn't mean much. She felt heavier but certainly not any older than she had felt at forty. But here was Elizabeth almost ready to come out and marry and found a family of her own and she (Savina) was still thinking of Elizabeth's mother as a girl. She thought how boisterous and masculine Elizabeth looked and then she read the caption saying that Elizabeth had organized a girls' polo team of which she was captain, and that made Savina think that if only she had been born a little later she might have had a life that was much more amusing. She could have done as Elizabeth did, ride cross-saddle and captain polo teams. Elizabeth could do as she pleased because there was no one to say, "Ladies don't do such things," and if she chose to marry nobody or nobody chose to ask her it wouldn't make any difference because old maids didn't exist any more. There were too many things they could do. They could be as free as men.

In the midst of her broodings she was aware that a door had opened and that two familiar voices were conversing quite near and it dawned upon her sharply that one voice was Doctor MaClellan's and the other was Hector's. She had a sudden feeling of guilt and wanted to

run away or to hide herself somewhere. She heard Doctor MaClellan saying, "That's what you need, I think. That would do you more good than anything," and, blushing violently, she looked up and saw that the door into the doctor's sanctum was closed and that Hector was standing there looking at her with a strange expression of confusion and anger. His face was flushed and the color this time was certainly not rouge.

She tried to say "Hello" casually but was aware that she sounded like a child caught stealing jam. Hector's round blue eyes stared at her suspiciously and he asked, "What are you here for? I thought there was never anything the matter with you." He said it as if from the pinnacle of his own martyrdom he was mocking her great healthy body.

"I've had a little trouble lately. Nothing very serious." And then nervously she added, "You're coming to tea, aren't you? Nancy sent word she was coming."

"I talked to her over the telephone. I haven't seen her yet."

"It's good having her back again."

"Yes, I suppose so."

The door of the sanctum opened and the nurse was standing there again waiting to show her in. It was all the more difficult to talk in front of a stranger.

"I've been having trouble with my stomach," she said pointlessly.

"Well, I hope it's not as bad as mine, for your sake. It's probably because you eat so much. When a person gets to our age he can't go on acting as if he was twenty."

The nurse was still standing there waiting and she felt desperately that she must bring the conversation to an end, so she said abruptly, "Will you dine with me this evening?"

"You know I don't go out any more. But you come and dine with me."

She knew that he refused on account of Alida but she was glad that he wanted her to dine with him in any case.

"What time?"

"Eightish."

Then she said suddenly, "Philip telephoned that he was coming to see me. He said he had a surprise. I don't know what it is."

She saw a queer look of pain come into the little round blue eyes. He said bitterly, "I don't know. He never tells me anything. He didn't even come home last night."

"Well, to-night then at eight."

"Yes. Good-by."

He went out into the corridor and she followed the nurse into Doctor MaClellan's sanctum.

3

It was an office that shined and glistened and in the midst of it Doctor MaClellan appeared also to shine and glisten. The whole atmosphere of antiseptic perfection gave Savina a twinge of discomfort and made her feel enormous, dusty, untidy and full of microbes. In the center of the room in the sunlight that came through the big window Doctor MaClellan sat at a shining table with a

glass top. He was all pink and white and navy blue with glasses more transparent and glittering than any glasses she had ever seen. At first she was awed and then she thought of him not as the great Doctor MaClellan but as Andrew MaClellan whom she had pommeled and whose hair she had pulled when she was a little girl.

He said, "Good afternoon, Savina," and told her to sit down, remarking that he hadn't seen her in three or four years and at the smooth sound of his voice it struck her that this wasn't Andrew any longer but a kind of beautiful and efficient machine functioning from a brilliant brain that lay behind the incredibly shining spectacles and the bright blue eyes, and she was afraid again and tempted to pretend that she had really come because that was something the matter with herself.

They tried a little banal conversation but it did not come to much because in the years since they had known each other well they had drifted apart and were more than strangers because they were old friends trying to recover the ground on which they had once stood. Savina thought too how unfortunate it was that Hector should have come just before her because the coincidence placed an added strain on them both. She guessed that Andrew MaClellan was pretending not to know anything about the long story of her devotion to Hector. Andrew MaClellan gave her the sense of an extremely busy man leaping from one operating room to another to cut open body after body which meant no more to him than one more experiment in which he might with luck find interesting complications. She was aware that it was impossible to go on

talking in the silly vein of two people making conversation in the corner of a ball-room, so she said abruptly, "I didn't come to see about myself. It's about Hector."

She grew red again and fancied that a sudden twinkle came into the cold blue eyes behind the spectacles. He turned to the desk and took up a pen made of onyx and gold and, grinning a little, he said, "There's nothing the matter with Hector. At least nothing the matter with him that I can fix up."

Nervously she said, "Of course I don't want to ask you anything unethical, and if you feel you shouldn't tell me, I won't ask you."

"If there was anything serious the matter with him perhaps I shouldn't tell unless he gave me permission. But there isn't." He turned the pen round and round in his pink clean fingers and grinned again. "I think he's disappointed and angry with me because I couldn't find anything the matter. When I told him there wasn't he said, 'All doctors are like that. If there's nothing the matter with me, why have I lost twenty pounds in three weeks'?"

"Well, why *has* he lost twenty pounds?"

"I don't know, but I'm fairly sure that it's his imagination." He looked at her suddenly and it seemed to her that the sharp blue eyes were examining the inside of her brain with an inhuman concentration. Then without looking at her he said, "You've known Hector all your life."

"Yes," and then she saw that he was thinking back over all the years, recovering the whole story of herself

and Hector, and she guessed that he wanted to be frank and honest with her and was not quite certain whether he dared to be, so she thought, "I will try to talk about Hector and myself in a detached way as if we were specimens and that will make it easier." Aloud she said, "I suppose I know him as well as anybody in the world."

"Then you know that he's always fancied himself more delicate and sensitive than other people."

"Yes."

"Well, all that has grown on him. He can imagine the symptoms of a disease and even produce most of them. He imagined cancer of the stomach and even managed to lose weight. You see, it's his way of attracting an attention and sympathy which he can't ask for openly. But you see it isn't possible to deceive an X-ray. We took all sorts of photographs of Hector's stomach. We even took a cinema of it at work. And there isn't anything but his imagination." He waited for a moment and then said, "Unfortunately we can't operate and remove the diseased portions of people's characters. If we could, the world would be filled with saints and angels. You see Hector thinks he's being neglected by every one, most of all I suppose by that nice young nephew of his, and all his relationship to Philip is tangled up with Hector's feelings toward Pat Dantry and Nancy. It's so complicated that none of us can understand it, least of all Hector. So he developed all the symptoms of cancer in order to attract pity and notice. At least that's my theory. I'm not, of course, a psychiatrist."

Savina felt a little dazed and said faintly, "Oh, I see."

"It's not a surgeon's job. Maybe one of these new psychologists could do something for him. I can't. Probably he's too old. He's been going on like this all his life. He can't help it, but there he is." He looked at her sharply. "It's the people like Hector whose lives are the real tragedies. People get over love affairs and deaths but people like Hector go on being tormented to the very end. I think the Greeks must have had people like Hector in mind when they invented the Furies."

He paused for a moment and then gave her a curious inquiring look, "How much do you know about life, Savina?"

She didn't know what she ought to answer but again an impulse toward frankness possessed her and she said, "As much, I suppose, as any worldly old virgin could know. I'm not shocked by anything and very rarely surprised."

"You see Hector's always been twisted up inside. There's a great deal in Hector that there is in an hysterical woman. What he needs is to stop thinking about himself and get interested in something or other. He used to be interested in collecting things but even that bores him now. I think travel might do him good. He hasn't stirred for fifteen years. Old people can travel nowadays, anywhere. It's all so easy and luxurious. He needs some one to shake him out of himself." He put down the onyx pen and looked out of the window. Then without turning he said, "Why don't you marry him, Savina, and take him off? It would be all right now. I don't suppose he'd be afraid of marriage now. He wants some one to look

after him. He's like a spoiled child who's suddenly without any one to spoil him."

She didn't answer him at once. Instead she began to think of Andrew himself and the strange things he was saying. It didn't seem possible that Andrew who was of her age and generation and born in a house just down the street could be looking at things with a detachment so cold and honest. He should have been wrapping the subject of Hector round and round, vaguely and clumsily, with the cotton wool of lies and evasions, and instead of that he was looking straight into the core of everything. That, she thought, must be because he was a man of science, and for the first time it occurred to her that science was honesty and that honesty was a great liberator. It cut away romance and sentiment and a great deal of nonsense but it left clean wounds which would heal quickly without scars, leaving life whole and sane and cured. It could make people less miserable because it dealt with hard realities instead of the unwholesome putrescence of dead moralities and of the high sentimental purities which had ruined so many lives. It seemed to her suddenly that before a girl like Elizabeth Towner and the children of Elizabeth Towner there lay a whole new world in which honesty and happiness were possible.

And at the same time she was thinking of Hector and of marrying him, recognizing at once that the wish to marry him, even now when they were old, had always been there in the back of her mind unadmitted even by herself because to other people and even to herself it seemed absurd and silly for her to marry anybody at her

age. She saw that the idea had become with her a sort of fixed mission which had withstood every rebuff even from Hector himself. It was as if she had been born to care for him. She could not think why, save that in spite of everything she still knew that she was the one person in the world who understood him and could save him perhaps from himself. Why shouldn't she marry him? Why shouldn't she ask him to marry her? After all there wasn't anything for him to fear now and it would be easier for them both than it had been on that hot May afternoon in the apple orchard at Staatsburg. She was an old woman now, sane and comfortable, and not an awkward trembling young girl driven on by a desire stronger than convention and stronger even than her own pride.

But she wanted to be convinced of all these things, so she said falsely, "I couldn't marry him now. It would be too ridiculous." And Andrew MaClellan laughed his curious hard, antiseptic laugh.

"Why not? There's nothing to keep you from it. If you asked him I'm sure he'd be too delighted to accept. He's lonely and frightened of old age and death and of being alone. But you mustn't expect him to do the asking. It would be like asking him to grow a new pair of legs. Why not? It would be a good ending for both of you. You could go away and travel, maybe take a trip around the world and enjoy yourselves and lead Hector to forgetting about himself. You both like living and eating well. It's what he needs. He's been fighting himself all his life and he's tired now and bitter."

Feeling panicky she rose abruptly and said, "I've got to go, Andrew. I've kept you long enough." She held out her hand. "Thanks for all you've said. I'll think it over."

He too rose and said suddenly, "Are you interested in scientific things, Savina?"

"Yes. I'm interested in almost everything. The older I get the less time there seems to be for learning all I want to learn."

"Would you like to see an X-ray cinema? It's a new wrinkle, quite exciting and quite valuable."

"I've kept you too long already."

"It doesn't matter. People can always wait for me."

He rang a bell and a sudden boyish enthusiasm took possession of him. His blue eyes twinkled and his pink healthy face grew pinker. The starched nurse appeared and he said, "Get me Mr. Champion's reel, Miss Fox. I want to show it to Miss Jerrold." He turned to Savina, "Come along into the dark room," and led her, somewhat startled and upset, through a door into a room where the windows were sealed and out of the darkness there gleamed a rectangle of faint silver.

Savina was thankful for the darkness because she felt confused again and awkward. There was something indecent and shocking in the thought of watching Hector's insides at work. She wanted to decline the treat Andrew was offering her but could not bring herself to dampen his obvious enthusiasm. It would be like slapping a small boy who wanted simply to entertain you with his tricks. And she was afraid that Andrew, who was so emancipated from all the background of their childhood, would think

her silly and unsportsmanlike. Imagine Aunt Juliana, she thought, watching a cinema of the insides of one of her gentlemen acquaintances.

So she sat down heavily and, composing herself with determination, awaited the ordeal, wondering whether it was ethical of a surgeon to show a cinema of your insides to some one else without first obtaining your permission. Perhaps Andrew thought it was all right because she and Hector were old friends, but of course that only made it worse. The inside of a stranger's stomach wouldn't be so bad because you couldn't imagine what his outside was like, but looking at a friend's stomach made you see and think all kinds of things. She heard a clicking sound behind her and the rectangle of silver was suddenly illuminated by a brilliant white light.

"Hector's reel isn't as good as some," said Andrew apologetically, "but I thought you'd be more interested in it. It's very difficult to get good X-rays of fat people. Very good, Miss Fox. We're ready."

And then all at once on the silver rectangle there appeared what seemed to be a clam or an oyster or some underwater plant which began to work evenly and rhythmically, coiling and uncoiling, churning, relaxing and contracting, engaged with a kind of terrible concentration upon dissolving morsels of darker stuff which seemed intent upon escape. It was, she thought, exactly like the things, half plant, half animal, which she had once watched on the bottom of the sea through the glass bottom of a boat off Catalina Island. And then she began to think about her own stomach and Andrew's stomach, seeing them

both at work in the same fashion, regardless of their own wills, behaving exactly like this strange voracious animal on the silver patch. She felt a little sick but determined to see it through and to convince Andrew that she was unmoved save by a genuine scientific interest. And then suddenly there was a little filliping sound behind her and the room was dark again and she heard Andrew saying, "You see, it's a perfect stomach. There's nothing the matter with it."

"I don't know," she answered weakly. "I couldn't say. It looked to me as if everything was the matter with it. But I must go now." They went out of the darkened room and Savina said, "Thank you, Andrew. You must dine with me some time."

"I'd like to."

And then suddenly she said, "Nancy Carstairs has come home."

"Hector's sister, Nancy?"

"Yes, she's coming to tea with me this afternoon."

"I'd like to see her again. She was very beautiful."

"I'll tell her. Good-by."

"Good-by."

As she went through the door she saw that he had already returned to his glass-topped table and his charts, and she felt ashamed of taking up so much of his time for reasons that were so vagrant and frivolous. She thought she must have been there for an hour but when she looked at her watch she saw that only twenty-five minutes had passed. She thought, "We covered a great deal of ground in twenty-five minutes."

There were two women sitting in the waiting-room, and as she passed them and went out of the door, it occurred to her that it must be dreadful to be like Andrew and always think of people in terms of insides. If you were like that you'd think even of a lovely woman like Nancy as a piece of machinery, a bundle of glands and nerves and organs, and if you fell in love with her there couldn't be any sentiment or romance because you would know exactly what was the matter with you. You would know that it was merely chemical and that you were being carried along by the machine you inhabited and by processes of nature much stronger than yourself. You would know that you desired her because certain glands were at work driving you on toward the accomplishment of something which wouldn't in your right mind possess such an overwhelming force. All that machinery inside you had the power of making you insane and idiotic and foolish as she herself had been that afternoon in the apple orchard. And it would be dreadful to see an X-ray cinema of the insides of some one in love, with the machinery all at work churning and relaxing and contracting, making you uncomfortable and baffled and unhappy, and it would be even worse to see a cinema of the insides of the same person when he'd fallen out of love and none of the machinery was very busy. But perhaps men like Andrew failed to take into account the soul. "I will," she thought, "cling to the soul and not think about the machinery," but then she could not help thinking that when the machine was worn out and finished the soul didn't amount to much.

Albert, having had his lunch, was waiting for her with the old-fashioned motor and as she drove slowly home through the tangled traffic, battling the mood of depression, she began again to think of Hector and suddenly she saw that she'd forgotten all about Alida and that of course Alida made the idea of her marrying Hector quite impossible. She saw that Alida's life and her own were far too deeply entangled for her to desert Alida now. It was as if she was married to Alida and if she married Hector it would be a scandal and people would say, "Poor Alida! What will she do now that that old fool Savina has got married?" It was too late now to change everything no matter how much she wanted to take possession of Hector and care for him and give him some of the quiet happiness he'd never known. One of them—Hector or Alida—would have to be sacrificed because it was impossible to look after them both. It was impossible to think of them living in the same house or setting out on a voyage together, even if Alida, freed of her imaginary illnesses, were able to travel. Alida and Hector hated and resembled each other too profoundly. Perhaps, she thought, she could divide her time between them without marrying Hector. She could travel with him because at their age nobody could believe there was anything scandalous between them and anyway in this day people didn't seem to mind if middle-aged and even young people went traveling unchaperoned. Alida would be angry but then Alida hadn't the right to keep her forever chained down to the house in Thirty-sixth Street.

She could find no proper solution of the puzzle but she was suddenly happy in the thought that two people

in the world loved her enough to be jealous of her and to quarrel over her.

The motor drew up before the door and she told Albert that she would want him at eight to go out to dinner. In the hall she dropped her sable coat and as she entered the living-room she saw Alida seated by the bow window surrounded by the wreckage of newspapers. She thought, "If only there could be a good murder every day in the year she wouldn't mind my leaving her." And Alida, hearing her heavy step, looked up and said in an excited voice, "They've discovered the murderer. It wasn't the mysterious Mr. Wilson at all."

And suddenly Savina, for no reason at all, seemed to see through Alida and see her stomach at work and at the same time she saw Rosa Dugan as a beautiful piece of machinery which had been destroyed. It wouldn't be any use to take a cinema of a piece of machinery which didn't move.

CHAPTER XXI

WHEN Melbourn left the Elsmores at the Ritz he determined to go directly to his flat instead of going downtown to the office. At home he would dictate some letters—one about the new speedboat which was to make the voyage from Port Jefferson to Sutton Place in forty minutes, one about the new Picasso (which he had determined during the night to buy) and one about the request for money to subsidize the New Symphony Orchestra. All these things he thought of as amusement and cultivation,

subjects which he kept, in his clear mind, completely separated from the pure cold adventurous business which took place in the office high above Trinity churchyard. As he stepped into the motor he was thinking that he would give half the amount requested of him for the orchestra, not because he would have missed the full amount, but because he did not mean to become known as a mountain of gold upon which every sort of organization might fatten itself.

While he was thinking of the orchestra he noticed the newspaper Nancy Elsmore had left on the seat of the motor. He saw the picture of Rosa Dugan sitting on the table with her knees crossed and the headline, NIGHT CLUB SINGER MURDERED IN EXCLUSIVE MURRAY HILL LOVE NEST, and he grinned at the profound vulgarity of the words "exclusive Murray Hill love nest." Love was love and passion was passion whether it was on Murray Hill or Riverside Drive and everybody had to submit to it in one form or another. "An exclusive love nest," he thought, grinning, "was simply a contradiction of terms."

The letters he meant to write went completely out of his head and he turned the page idly to read the rest of the story. Then, for the first time, he saw that the night club singer was Rosa Dugan, and that made everything different. She wasn't just a cheap chippy. She was Rosa Dugan.

When he saw that Rosa Dugan was dead, he had a sudden regret that he hadn't gone to hear her sing three nights ago when Fanny had wanted to go. He hadn't gone simply because Fanny had annoyed him more than

usual that night and because he knew she only wanted to go because it was the thing to do. Everybody was beginning to talk about Rosa Dugan and Rosa's Place was the place where everybody was beginning to go. And now she was dead.

He read the story with an indifferent interest, thinking that with its overtones of bootleggers and night club life it was the most commonplace of crimes written in an overstrained fashion by some hack reporter who tried to make it interesting. It was only Rosa Dugan who made it interesting. If it had been an ordinary night club dancer it wouldn't have mattered. And then half way through, the story began to acquire an extraordinary interest. He began to read about "Mr. Wilson" and "the little black man" and the emerald shirt studs and the greasy cap, and as the motor drew up before his own flat a curiously distinct memory returned to him. He saw a tall woman in a fur coat helping a drunken man out of a taxicab across the sidewalk to the door of a house in Thirty-fifth Street. The snow was flying and his own motor was stalled before a huge drift waiting for the taxicab to move in order that it might pass. And all at once he thought, "Mr. Wilson is Jim Towner," and then he was aware that the car had stopped and that the chauffeur was standing between two piles of glistening snow, holding the door open for him to get down.

Thrusting the paper into his pocket he said, "Come back at a quarter to one," and crossed the sidewalk into the house.

Even when he had shut himself in his own library he still kept seeing the two figures crossing the sidewalk

through the blizzard and the more he thought of it the more certain he became that the man who looked like Jim Towner *was* Jim Towner. His plans for dictating a dozen letters were completely shattered and he did not ring for his secretary but seated himself at the big rosewood desk and, taking out the paper, read the story of the murder all over again. He saw that the number of the house where the murder had occurred must be the same as that of the house where the taxicab stood before the door in the snow. And again he thought, "Such things don't happen." Yet he experienced a curious certainty that it had happened.

And as he thought of it, all the implications of his knowledge began to emerge and assume a definite and disturbing coherence. He saw suddenly that he himself might become a figure in the scandal simply because by accident he had been one of the last persons to see Rosa Dugan alive. Perhaps only two others—"Mr. Wilson" and "the little black man"—had seen her after him, and the one who had killed her had seen her last of all. "The little black man" might escape and he himself would never be suspected of any knowledge, but "Mr. Wilson" was certain to be found out, and then awful things would begin to happen. They would accuse Jim Towner of having murdered Rosa Dugan and to save him everything possible would have to be done. And he told himself again that Jim Towner couldn't have done it because he wasn't the sort of man who could murder any one. He wasn't passionate or violent. He was more like a stolid powerful ox. If he had killed her it could only have been

to rid himself of her, and, although he was a stupid man, he couldn't be stupid enough to have killed her in the very house where he was keeping her.

And suddenly he saw that Jim Towner had certainly not done the murder because he was so drunk that a baby could have escaped from him.

He examined the paper again and found that the police fixed the time of the murder as about three in the morning. It couldn't then have been possible for Jim Towner to have done it because at two o'clock he was so drunk he couldn't walk. He couldn't have strangled a baby let alone a strong Irishwoman of Rosa's class and profession.

For a moment his glance wandered idly down the page and presently fixed upon another story. It followed directly the story of the Dugan murder and read:

This morning at eight o'clock while sweeping out the areaway, Jaime Anappie, Philippine butler in the household of Mrs. Henry Ellsworth of 918 East Fifty-seventh Street, discovered the body of a man since identified by the police as "Lucky Sam" Lipschitz, a gunman and bootlegger with a long criminal record. The body had three gunshot wounds. The bullets had entered the back, pierced the lungs and emerged on the other side. It is believed that Lipschitz was shot in some brawl in the whitelight district and his body thrown into the areaway during last night's blizzard. It is the first case of a gunman having been taken for a ride and killed in the heart of the city and the boldness of the crime is leading the police to unusual efforts to clear up the murder.

Beside the story there was a rogue's gallery portrait of Lucky Sam who was wall-eyed and had a flat Kalmuck nose and a great scar across his face. Looking at the picture, Melbourn thought idly, "Certainly he would not have been hard to identify."

The paragraph held no particular interest. It seemed as commonplace as the market quotations of vegetables in Washington market, but it led him suddenly to think how fascinating it would be if you could lift the lid off the whole city at night, and from some position high above it, could watch all that was happening there, seeing and understanding all the tangled skeins of crime and passion and success and defeat. And he saw that number 918 East Fifty-seventh Street was almost at the corner of Sutton Place and that for a second time in a single night he had passed by chance very close to violent death without being aware of it until long afterward. The body might have been there in the areaway as he and Fanny drove past on their way from Hector's dinner, and suddenly he grinned again because it struck him as preposterous that such things could happen in the midst of a great civilized city like New York and then he thought that perhaps the city was not civilized at all but only a kind of armed barbaric camp in which a savage warfare continued day and night and that in this warfare the death of Lucky Sam Lipschitz was merely the crudest bit of evidence. There were other battles, less obvious and more subtle, in which he himself had taken part, and in which he had seen men ruined and disgraced. It was all very complicated

and intricate and fascinating, and it was odd that he'd never thought about it before.

But he was aware again that Jim Towner had to be thought of and, pulling his mind back from its amusing game of drifting, he began to consider Jim's problem and saw at once that the worst element in it was Fanny. A woman like that, hysterical and wanting adoration and notice, might do anything, and of course the first thing she would do would be to dramatize herself and become a very self-conscious heroine. Again the thought returned to him that he alone could perhaps save Jim Towner if worst came to worst, and slowly he began with his active imagination to construct all the dreadful results which might come from his having seen Jim Towner and Rosa Dugan entering a house together. With distaste he saw Jim Towner on trial amid the shouts and screams of blackguard sensational newspapers, being driven slowly and surely toward prison or perhaps even death, cheated in his very trial by the prejudices of a jury of little clerks and shopkeepers which would hate him because he was rich and did not work and had had the pleasure of keeping and loving a notoriously attractive woman. And all his own contempt for the sort of man and the kind of mentality which composed most juries filled him with a baffled sense of rage. His old conviction that the world should be ruled with an iron hand by the intelligent few became so alive again that it tangled itself in the aspects of an event which had not yet occurred and suddenly placed him on the side of Jim Towner for whom he had never felt anything but contempt.

No, he thought, Jim Towner wouldn't have a chance, and then when there seemed no hope of saving him, he, David Melbourn, would have to come forward and mix himself in the whole cheap sordid affair by telling that contemptible jury that he had seen Jim Towner an hour before the murder and that he couldn't have done it because he was too drunk. And then the district attorney, because he was on the make and if he was clever, would ask him if he wasn't a friend of the defendant and he could answer quite truthfully, "No, not at all." And again the district attorney, if he was clever, would ask in a very special voice, "But you're a friend of Mrs. Towner, aren't you?" and he would have to answer "Yes" and the district attorney would ask slyly, "A *very* good friend, aren't you?" and he would suddenly be dragged by that single phrase into the midst of the wretched affair and find his name blackened along with all the others in the kind of common, filthy paper which lay there before him on the desk. There would be feature articles and photographs about "the wickedness of society people" and headlines about "society scandals in Park Avenue" and all the loathsome dirt which brightened the lives of the swarming morons who packed the subways and movie theaters. He, David Melbourn, would have his reputation dragged through the dirt for the delectation of thousands of half-witted animals. He might have to submit to all this in order to save a man for whom he felt only contempt and who was raised above the level of all that herd only by the accident of his wealth.

And again he thought, "None of this can be true. Such things don't happen." But he saw at once that everybody

concerned in such an affair must think the same thing. Even the murderer, when he had recovered his senses, must think, "It isn't true. It couldn't have happened." And he tried to imagine "the little black man" who had left behind the cheap greasy cap. If they could only find him everything would be all right and the worst Jim Towner would have to face would be a scandal. But how find him, the owner of a cap that was like a million other caps? The emerald shirt studs and the name "Mr. Wilson" were clues that were so much easier.

And all at once he felt suddenly afraid as he had been once before when he sat in a tiny room with the door locked and Verna Hostetter on the other side of the door alternately abusing him and trying to lure him into her bed, and with a terrible clarity he saw again how near he had himself come to murder and that in his heart and mind he was a murderer for in his imagination he had killed Verna Hostetter many times, without sorrow or remorse. Such things *were* possible. Any one *might* commit murder. It was a question of circumstances and pressure.

He thought, "I must do something. I've saved myself before. I've even escaped prison. I've done it by being clear-headed and seeing all around the thing. This time I've got to save Jim Towner somehow in order to save myself. It isn't possible to sit quietly and let a man be sent to jail or perhaps death when you could give testimony that would save him or at least throw doubt on the affair. No, even I couldn't do that." And he reflected bitterly that most of the trouble in the world was not caused by scoundrels but by fools who lost their heads like Jim

Towner, leaving behind the tell-tale collar and emerald shirt studs. Perhaps the murderer, too, was a fool or a madman, leaving behind the clue of that dirty, greasy cap. And all at once he remembered the emerald studs. He remembered having noticed them out of sheer boredom while he was listening to Jim Towner tell a long and pointless story over Hector Champion's dinner table. He saw them again, glittering and green, in the shirt front, spotted a little with the brandy Jim Towner had spilled in a tipsy moment. No, there couldn't any longer be any doubt. The studs belonged to Jim Towner. He wouldn't have noticed them if Jim Towner had not bored him with that long story about his polo ponies.

He swore with annoyance at the thought that all this had happened just when he needed his head clear for other things. He saw that now he couldn't put his whole mind into the business of the Gobi mines because all the time he would be thinking about Jim Towner and the danger that was hanging over Jim Towner and so in a way over himself, and he understood suddenly that all along his instinct in the affair with Fanny had been right. He should never have entangled himself with her, and the air of uneasiness and foreboding that hung over him from that first meeting in the roadhouse was neither nerves nor imagination but the kind of hunch he had always followed until he met Fanny. It was sound solid instinct telling him not to involve himself with this foolish pretty woman. He had not even disobeyed that instinct through passion or desire, but only out of boredom and because the whole thing seemed so easy.

He got up, and crossing the room, poured himself a drink of whiskey and when he had done that he went to the window and stood looking down into the street, which stretched away between walls of brick and stone, white and glistening in the sunlight, with the snow in great walls along the curbstones, and although the snow still glittered, the street seemed darker and changed in some subtle way. It wasn't the same street now. Even the familiar room with its dark walls of books and its thin, bright, modern drawings had changed. It had grown somber and small and the pictures looked strange as if they didn't belong to time.

"No," he thought, "it couldn't be true. Such things don't happen." And his awareness of the unreality of the affair seemed suddenly to reach out and touch his own life and the lives of people he knew and the very life of the city itself. It couldn't be real either. There was no such place. And he, David Melbourn, who stood here in the familiar library that was suddenly too dark and oppressive, could not be the same David Melbourn who had seen his father that day in the vacant lot nor the same David Melbourn who had locked himself in against Verna Hostetter. And his affair with Fanny hadn't been true. It was all queer and vague like a nightmare. He had a sudden curious feeling of having been hustled along through life without ever having had time to live, and all at once it seemed to him, who had always done exactly what he wanted, that he had never chosen his own destiny at all. Everything had been arranged for him and he had been pushed into the long career which lay behind him by something

much stronger than himself. And again he experienced that tired, confused sense of relaxation which had troubled him more and more frequently and he thought, "Maybe I'm on the edge of a nervous breakdown. Maybe that's how it feels. Perhaps the edge between reality and unreality becomes all fuzzy and small things take on enormous proportions."

He began to walk up and down the room, thinking all the while, "I must get control of myself. I must pull myself out of this strange feeling of confusion and dread. Perhaps I'm growing old and the machine is beginning to crack and I'll lose everything I've fought for and suddenly be dead without having known a moment of rest."

And then he thought of Ruby, cool and poised and sure of herself, and of how she had listened to the long story of his life without being bored, and it struck him suddenly that his telling the whole story to her was another sign of this same mysterious weakness which he felt quietly surrounding and engulfing him. When he thought of Ruby, it seemed to him that she could help him because she was a person to whom he could tell everything, and he admitted to himself that for the first time in his life he needed some one to talk to. With Ruby he wouldn't be alone any longer. It was odd how he didn't think of her first of all as a woman to whom he might make love, but as a friend. That, perhaps, was a good sign. If their bodies didn't dominate their relationship, there was a good chance that everything would go well. It was the element of the flesh which grew unruly and upset the relationships between men and women. One or the other always grew tired and bored.

At first it was always too powerful and then when it died away there was nothing left but emptiness and boredom. No, with Ruby everything would be all right and he would regain control of himself and together they'd go away and leave this cursed city which he hated suddenly with an unreasoning, almost hysterical, intensity. Contentment and happiness lay somewhere, anywhere, away from the borders of this city. With a sudden amazement he realized that it was the first time in his life he'd ever thought about happiness.

Then he noticed again the picture of Rosa Dugan lying on the polished desk and his mind returned sharply to Jim Towner and Fanny and all the mess in which he found himself involved, and he thought, "This is the first time since I rid myself of Verna that I've found myself mixed up in the lives of other people." But the whole thing seemed much clearer now and much less ominous. He thought, "Perhaps it wasn't Jim Towner whom I saw going into the house. Perhaps it was Jim Towner and the woman wasn't Rosa Dugan. Perhaps it was a different house. I've been jumping at conclusions like a nervous woman. I've got to keep my head."

And in the midst of his thoughts there was a gentle knock at the door and a voice saying, "The car is here, Mr. Melbourn."

He looked at the desk and saw that it was empty save for the picture of Rosa Dugan with the headline, NIGHT CLUB SINGER STRANGLED IN EXCLUSIVE MURRAY HILL LOVE NEST. He had done nothing in the hour he had been in the library. He hadn't written the

letter to the orchestra nor the letter about the speedboat. He hadn't even rung for his secretary. And he thought, "This is the first time I've ever done such a thing. I must be beginning to go to pieces."

2

He lunched with the Elsmores in their sitting-room with windows which gave out on the long canyon of Madison Avenue, and Melbourn, sitting opposite Nancy Elsmore, watched her with a kind of fascination, thinking how pretty she was but disturbed too by an uneasiness which tormented him because he could not define it at once and so put it at rest. They talked of the voyage and the weather but most of all of the city which appeared now to frighten Lady Elsmore. And then, over the salad, Melbourn knew what it was that disturbed him. He was sitting opposite an old lady who appeared to have no age at all, and she had a face, very pretty to be sure, which seemed quite empty when it should have been changing and animated. It was grotesque and its grotesqueness fascinated him, causing him to steal glances at her when she was unaware that he was watching her. Her face by every abstract test was a younger face than Fanny's with its worried discontented expression, yet it was old and tired in a strange inexplicable way. It was in the eyes, he decided at last, that age betrayed itself. There were moments when the brilliant dark eyes were weary and full of wisdom. She was like a wax mannequin miraculously endowed with life. She was, he thought, almost as brainless as such a mannequin would be. Her gift, even now, appeared to be the gift of pleasing men, and he saw

suddenly that all her life must have been spent in flattering and cosseting and soothing men, and when he thought of Fanny he saw that this gift was among the greatest the Gods could bestow upon a woman; for her own sake as well as the sake of all men. It was that which in the end a man wanted more than anything else, more than a beautiful body and a brilliant mind or hearty companionship. He saw why Sir John adored her and watched her as if she were altogether new to him instead of a wife, no longer young, to whom he had been married for years. And at the same time he remembered Ruby and the sandwiches and whiskey sitting on the table with the bowl of flowers beside them and felt extraordinarily sure of himself and happier than he had been in months.

A knock at the door interrupted all the train of reflection which he carried on behind the curtain of polite and banal conversation and at Sir John's "Come in," a man entered carrying a silver tray with a note on it. As soon as he saw the note he knew what it was. He recognized the steel gray envelope, large and square in shape, and a moment later he recognized the sprawling emotional handwriting of Fanny and he thought angrily, "She's run me down even here," and began to see that this might be the beginning of a long series of annoyances and scenes. He was suddenly angry and aware that in his brain there seemed to be a sudden hard knot as if his nerves were all tangled, and he felt a violent wave of cold hatred for her and determined to stamp her out of his life by violence if necessary. "We've finished," he thought. "There's nothing to go on with."

The man explained that he hadn't known Mr. Melbourn

was lunching upstairs and that he had been waiting for him in the lobby. Melbourn tipped him and laid the envelope beside his plate, aware at the same time that Lady Elsmore was reading the address written in the wobbly emotional handwriting and the word "Urgent" underscored so hysterically that the line of the pen had exploded suddenly into a blot.

He had meant not to open it until he was alone but the word "urgent" made him suddenly suspect that perhaps after all she was not writing to him to get him back but because she had discovered what had happened to Jim and did not know what to do. Abruptly he changed his course and said, "Do you mind if I open it?"

They did not mind, but to his annoyance they sat quite still as people do when some one is speaking over the telephone in a crowded room, and he felt violently self-conscious as if they were able to divine by some process of telepathy what was written on the steel gray paper.

He read it through and knew at once that his guess had been right. And he saw that there was no escape now from seeing her again and talking to her; but he understood that the woman who had written this note was a new Fanny whom he did not know, a Fanny chastened and willing to sacrifice her pride. Only once, really, did the old Fanny betray herself. It was when she wrote, "I don't know what I'll do. I might do anything." That was the old Fanny trying vainly to awe him by threats of scenes.

He thrust the note into his pocket and said, "May I use your telephone?" and then suddenly flushed and added, "The one in the bed-room? It's not for an ordinary con-

versation." He saw the gleam of wild curiosity in Nancy Elsmore's eyes and then left them, closing the door behind him as he went into the bed-room.

It was Fanny herself who answered him and he knew then that she had been sitting by the telephone waiting for him to call. At the sound of her voice he experienced again a sudden tightening of his distaste for her and everything she represented, and he felt a curious shameful desire to humiliate her, to force her to her knees, not for anything she had done to him, but because of what she was and what she had done to other people, oddly enough, even for what she had done to Jim Towner. It was as if he had become the champion of all men in their contest against shameless shallow women like her. It seemed to him that not only Fanny but Verna Hostetter had spoken to him from the other end of the wire.

He said quietly, "This is David."

"You got my note?"

"Yes."

"When can I see you?"

"That depends. Is it important?"

"I should think my note made that clear." And he was aware with pleasure that there was a sudden tightening and irritation in the voice. He felt an impulse to laugh at the very tone of it. He imagined her sitting at her dressing-table, poised dramatically, enjoying even a situation as horrible as this one.

"I'm sorry, Fanny, but I've had notes like that before from you."

"Well, it hasn't got anything to do with me or you. It hasn't got anything to do with anything between us."

"You're sure?" He thought, "She has got to humiliate herself this once. It will do her good."

"I'm sure." He knew then that she was losing her temper and in the next moment he heard her saying, "If you think I'd humiliate myself like this just for the sake of beginning over again you must be insane."

"What is it then?"

"I can't tell you over the telephone."

"I'm sorry, Fanny, but I can't come unless I know there's a good reason. I'm a busy man."

There was a silence as if she were thinking and then suddenly she asked, "Have you read the afternoon papers?"

"Of course."

"Did you read about Rosa Dugan?"

"Yes."

Then again there was a silence and presently in a voice that was almost a whisper she said, "Jim is 'Mr. Wilson.'"

He had forced her to say it and suddenly he found himself grinning at the telephone. He had made her do exactly as he meant her to do. He said, "I'll come over at once. In twenty minutes. I haven't much time."

He heard the receiver click at the other end of the wire and felt ashamed of himself, not because he was sorry for Fanny, but because he had permitted himself to become so childish and small. This kind of thing, he told himself, was beneath his dignity and he ought not to waste upon it the time and the energy which it required. It seemed to him that he had yielded despite himself to some perverse and

spinsterish instinct. But at the same time he saw that everything concerned with love came back again in the end to the same thing. It made fools of men, whether it was the merest passion or love in the noblest sense. The very act of love was a ridiculous and undignified affair which considered in cold blood and with detachment could only be absurd and grotesque. Sober men became perfectly silly and said and did the most idiotic things which no man in his right mind could possibly do. Yet nobody escaped it who was not strange and abnormal, neither gunmen nor ministers of state nor clergymen nor bankers nor street laborers.

Nobody could escape that terrible compulsion which had just caused him to behave like a child. He saw again that he had never *wanted* to take up with Fanny.

He ground down the end of his cigarette into the glass ash tray with a sudden violence and, rising, went back to the sitting-room where Nancy Elsmore received him with her large dark eyes still bright with curiosity. He apologized abruptly and said that he must leave them and that he would return for Sir John in an hour. Nancy Elsmore made little fluttering protests as if she were still young and inviting, and he felt a sudden disgust at this new manifestation of the thing which at the moment he detested so much that he could not even think of Ruby as a woman to be desired.

CHAPTER XXII

AT sight of Fanny he found himself compelled to grin. She came into the high library where he was waiting, dressed all in black with little touches of white lace at the wrists and throat. He guessed that the curtains were partly drawn so as to shut out the brilliant afternoon sunlight that would have been much too gay for the occasion. He saw that she had left off all make-up and appeared therefore pale and saddened. Clearly, she meant to enjoy the drama no matter how dismal the consequences of the subject which engaged them.

He stood up and as she came toward him he saw that all the protective veneer of her plan for the encounter had suddenly cracked and that, not knowing exactly how to greet him, she had become confused and awkward. He was aware that the meeting was not easy for either of them but that on his own side it was much easier because he really did not care whether it was disagreeable or not. He helped her by holding out his hand. She took it and said, "Hello," as casually as possible.

There was an awkward pause for she appeared to discover suddenly that in all her long experience in the world there was no formula for receiving a lover who had cast you off and been forced to return against his will, and to make it easier for her he sat down and said, "Do you mind if I have a cigar? I was interrupted in the midst of lunch."

She murmured, "No," in a funny strangled voice and

sat on the sofa, quite near the edge with her small pretty feet close together. He took out the cigar and, trying to be as casual as possible, said as he lighted it, "I guessed what was the matter. It's a rotten business." But he did not tell her that he had guessed because he had seen Jim, dead drunk, being helped across the pavement by Rosa Dugan at two o'clock the morning before. His instinct told him to hold that piece of information until the end and then to use it only if it were necessary to save Jim. If it wasn't necessary, nobody ever need know.

She began to cry softly, so softly, that he guessed her tears were genuine and not merely the crocodile tears which she was able to control with such a vicious skill.

"I'm at the end of things," she said. "I don't know what to do. I wouldn't have sent for you if I hadn't been at the end."

"Where's Jim?" he asked, aware immediately that it was the first time he had ever called her husband "Jim" and that it was because he felt suddenly sorry for her and wanted to make her feel that he would do his best to help.

"He's no good. He's asleep, completely done in. He was dead drunk last night. He couldn't have . . . He couldn't have done it. And he fell down the stairs when he was leaving and broke his arm. He's no good. He's a hindrance more than anything else. He hasn't any head." The tears came faster and faster and she said, "What are we going to do? In the name of God, what are we going to do?"

For a second time he became aware of a new Fanny—the same new Fanny he had caught in a sudden glimpse

as he read the note. If she had come into the room meaning to be dramatic, she had forgotten it by now. She was human and real and her tears made her soft and attractive. But he told himself that he did not mean to be caught again, no matter what happened, and he said, "Did Jim tell you everything?"

"Yes."

"Tell me what he said. Tell me what really happened. We'd better go at it at the right end."

So she told him everything Jim had told her while he sat on the foot of her bed, and as she talked Melbourn, with the curious detachment which had descended upon him the night before at Hector's dinner, became slowly more interested in the spectacle of Fanny herself, tortured and humiliated with all her vanity crushed, than by the story she was telling. He kept thinking cruelly, "All this will do her good. In the end she will emerge passably decent. She's never had anything happen to her before." But as he listened he saw too that everything between them was certainly not finished, at least on her side, and he became uncomfortably aware of something in the air which made him uneasy. He could not say what it was but he felt that he could do with her whatever he liked and that all the while she was repeating Jim's story she was deep down inside her wanting him back on any terms and that her mind was more occupied with that than with the sordid story itself. It was as if her body betrayed her and her mind became transparent. He looked at her so intently that in the middle of a sentence she halted and asked abruptly, "What is it? Why are you staring at me?" and he answered, "I wasn't

staring. I was only thinking of what you were telling me."

When she had finished he said quietly, "I thought it was all rather like that."

"What are we to do?"

For a moment he was silent and then he said, "There's only one thing—to clear out, all of you, as soon as possible—to-night if there's a boat."

"There's the *Paris*. I'd thought of that. We're packed. Even the passports are in order. We had them visaed last year when we went to Scotland."

He saw her flush suddenly and knew at once that it was because the word Scotland brought up to both of them the return voyage on which they had met each other.

"But what are we to do when they find out who 'Mr. Wilson' is? If they began cabling to Europe and Jim is run down by foreign police . . . extradition and all that. It would be dreadful."

"If worst came to worst, he'd come home quietly, wouldn't he?"

"Yes. What else could he do?"

"Then I think it could all be done as quietly as possible."

"But how?"

"It's been done before. I think I could put a word in the right place."

"That's why I wanted you to come. I couldn't think of any one else."

"Of course if they can only find the man who did it—the fellow who left the cap, it would all be much easier. The worst that could happen would be the scandal. Even

that might be avoided. But you must tell me where you are going and keep me informed where you are."

"I don't know where to go. Anywhere at all out of New York."

"Spain is a good country. Yes, I should choose Spain if I were you. I should get on the boat as soon as possible and not be seen again and I shouldn't tell any one that you were leaving. If any one asks, I should say you were going to California."

He stood up and she too rose from the sofa, looking up at him. The tears on her cheeks made no difference because there was no make-up to be ruined. It struck him that for the first time she seemed real to him and not a preposterous affected woman who bored him, and again he said to himself that he did not mean to soften toward her. It was all finished and he had found another woman who was the right sort.

"I have to run along, Fanny. There's nothing to be done but what I advised." He took her hand as if to reassure her. "I'll do everything that can be done. You can count on me. I think the chances are that everything will turn out . . . well, better than might be expected."

He felt her hand clutching his hysterically and the sense of her overstrained emotion filled him with the old revulsion. He freed himself as gently as possible and said, "I've only one promise to ask of you."

She looked away and said dully, "I shan't annoy you. I know it's all finished."

"It wasn't that."

"What was it?" she said in a low voice and something in

the voice made him understand that in her mind there was a sudden flicker of hope which had flamed up out of the dying ashes of the thing, whatever it had been, which had existed between them for a few months. If he said what he meant to say it would make her see that everything was finished with an unmistakable finality. It would hurt her but he did not much care whether he hurt her or not so long as he himself got free.

He said, "You must promise me that you'll never once bring up this whole thing when you quarrel with Jim."

"I don't mean to quarrel with him any more." She said it quietly and sadly, but he smiled a little and said, "You don't mean to quarrel at the moment, Fanny. You're full of good intentions. But you will . . . as surely as the sun rises to-morrow. And I'm afraid that the easier you get out of this affair the more likely you'll be to quarrel."

"That's a nasty thing to say."

"Nasty, but true. You must promise me never to refer to it to him unless he speaks of it first."

"I promise."

"Can I believe you?"

"I promise."

"I know how devilish you can be." And he thought, "There, now she knows it's finished."

After a silence, she said, "You've been very cruel to me. You were cruel to me over the telephone."

"It's much better that way."

She was beginning, he saw, slowly and with the skill of an intuitive emotional woman to lead away from the reason for his visit to the thing which had never been out

of her mind or out of his mind as well all the time they had sat there talking. If he did not escape at once he would find himself entangled in a long and bickering discussion of their relations. She might even manage to entangle him all over again in the hateful thing itself. Even now, after he had hurt her, she had not finished. She would not give up hope until she had found another man or her feeling for him had died of sheer boredom. They must simply not see each other again.

So he looked at his watch in the briskest possible fashion and said, "Well, I must be off. Bon voyage. If you want me before you sail I'll be at the office until five. After that I'll be at home."

It was on the tip of his tongue to say that he was stopping at Savina's on the way home to fetch Ruby Wintringham and it was only by the narrowest chance that he had avoided it. Disturbed, he took her hand again and again felt her hand clasp his hysterically. She looked up at him and he knew that she wanted him to kiss her good-by, but he did nothing. He turned quickly and walked out of the door and out of the house.

2

From three o'clock until five-thirty he sat with Sir John Elsmore in a paneled room forty-two stories above the street overlooking the whole of New York harbor. They had several files of papers to which they referred from time to time and a number of maps which they rustled and shuffled about a good deal. Three mining experts came in and went out again and secretaries and typists came and

went beneath the Raeburn portrait that hung oddly out of place over a French fireplace which had no chimney and possessed the heating qualities of a theatrical fireplace. And at last, after weighing all the difficulties that could arise from the chaos in China on the one side and the chaos in Russia on the other, it was decided to go ahead with the business which some day might be the cause of wars.

When it was finished, Miss Einstein brought Melbourn and Sir John their coats and hats and before he left the office Melbourn went over to stand beside Sir John who was lost in an un-British excess of enthusiasm over the splendor of the view. But Melbourn wasn't looking at the view. He was looking up the river where the stacks of the *Paris* showed above the black roofs of the sheds and was thinking that his luck had held again, because in an hour or two Fanny would be on board bound for Europe and out of his life forever. She wouldn't dare return until the whole scandal had died away, and that would be a matter of two or three years.

He turned away from the window thinking that after he had dropped Sir John at the Ritz he would go to Cartier's and select an emerald for Ruby and then stop for her at Savina Jerrold's. Now that Fanny was gone he and Ruby could do as they pleased.

The door opened and Miss Einstein returned bringing in the late papers. Glancing idly at the headlines he saw that Rosa Dugan's murderer had been caught. He had, it seemed, given himself up to the police. And the murderer was not "Mr. Wilson." He was "the little black man" who had left behind the greasy cap.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE Valparaiso Hotel was a gaunt building high and narrow and painted a sickly yellow which overlooked the railroad tracks and the piers of the North River where ships from the Mediterranean docked. On the first floor there had once been a saloon which had become for a time a restaurant and then reverted again to a speakeasy, but neither the frosted glass of its windows nor the depressing yellow paint of its interior had ever been altered. Abovestairs there were twenty cubicles called bed-rooms lighted by gas, most of them unheated, which were let to any one callous enough or unfortunate enough to find them bearable. The clients were negro roustabouts and longshoremen and drunken sailors and occasionally one of the hard-eyed women of the neighborhood who brought a man with her to spend an hour or two in the dreary delights of a love shared with a stoker who had not seen a woman for weeks and months. Most of the bedclothes were blankets of a dirty gray shade and what passed by the name of bed linen was only a sort of cotton sacking yellow and stained by the crude boiling which was the only laundering it ever knew.

The proprietress was of a piece with her establishment, a tall and heavy women built like a man, with a pockmarked face and a mustache of coarse bristling gray hair. In her youth she had been a prostitute on the streets of Bremen and Hamburg, and she had undertaken the hotel with the

money she had earned in middle age as the proprietress of a brothel in Valparaiso. She spoke with a thick accent and drank a good deal of the bad gin which she sold in her "restaurant." She rose early and went late to bed, acting as proprietress, bartender and even scrubwoman of her own establishment. She was wiry and powerful and vigorous and afraid of nobody and nothing save prison. It happened that she had risen early and was sweeping out the restaurant when Sicily Tony appeared in the doorway out of the dying blizzard. She saw him, without herself being seen, look behind him in fright and close the door with a swift stealthy gesture, and as he passed just beyond her on the other side of the frosted glass screen she saw the look in his bloodshot eyes. Because she had spent all her life in a world where such things carried a significance, she knew that Sicily Tony was in trouble and that the trouble might involve herself.

She managed fairly well her relation with the police. She was friendly with the ones who frequented her own neighborhood, gave them drinks and even exchanged gossip concerning the doings of the unsavory quarter. Her only anxiety was centered in the men from headquarters who did not know her blandishments nor the solid position which she occupied as a waterfront character and a citizen who owned property. Those men who didn't know her might make trouble for her.

When she saw Tony bolting up the stairs with the cap pulled over his eyes she knew that he was crazy from want of drugs and that he had done something which had frightened him, but she did not bother to find out what

it was. From long experience she had learned to live and let live. She did not meddle in what did not concern her, and in her waterfront world the sight of Tony running up the stairs as if pursued by some invisible horror did not greatly excite her curiosity because she had seen that kind of thing too many times. More often than not, she knew, it turned out to mean nothing which concerned her.

It was only at seven o'clock that she finished cleaning the restaurant and went outside to sweep away the snow, and it was only when she saw a man lingering in the doorway of the house opposite that she became interested and began to put two and two together. Pretending that she did not see him she continued to sweep, stopping from time to time to jab loose with the handle of her broom the bits of snow that had become caked under passing feet. But as she swept she managed from time to time to steal a glance at the doorway. The sun was growing brighter and brighter and because its glitter blinded her and because the man kept in the shadow of the doorway she could not, without entirely betraying her interest, make absolutely certain of his identity.

She swept slowly and expended a minute care in clearing away every bit of snow and at last, after standing for a moment in the doorway to look up and down the snow-choked street, she went inside. There, protected by the frosted class, she pressed her mustachioed face closely against the window and peered long and carefully.

She saw what she had suspected she would see. She was quite right. The man was short with enormous muscular shoulders and skinny legs. His figure was so

grotesque that you saw it even through the thick gray overcoat which covered him. He was Dave the Slapper. Mrs. Dacklehorst recognized him. He was looking at the front of the Valparaiso Hotel, staring up and down from one row of windows to another. While she peered through the frosted glass she saw another figure come up the street and slide into the deep doorway. It was a fat short man with a pink face and enormous hips. He stood with his hands thrust into the pockets of his coat so that the hips stuck out grotesquely like the rump of one of the sows in her grandfather's farmyard at Oldenburg near Bremen. She saw them talking together and she saw Dave the Slapper nod with his head and without taking his hands from his pockets toward one of the windows on the fourth floor of the Valparaiso Hotel. She waited for a moment longer, watching, and then heard a voice behind her and turned.

It was Tony. He still wore his overcoat and his long curly black hair hung over his forehead into his eyes. His face, she saw now, was all scratched and torn. Somebody, a woman most likely, had gone for him.

In a hoarse voice he asked for some warm water. She went to fetch him a pitcher from the range in the kitchen and when she returned she found him standing in the same spot where she had stood, peering through the frosted glass at the doorway opposite. She had to speak to him before he would turn away, and when he did turn she saw that his face was white and that he was shivering. He took the water and, looking at her, said, "Got any stuff?"

"No. You know I ain't never got any."

Then he went quietly but quickly across the room and up the stairs carrying the water.

She had seen enough, and she went back to the bar where she could polish the glasses while she thought about what she had seen. It was all clear to her now like a picture puzzle when the pieces had been pasted together. Grimly she regarded the picture.

There must have been a killing somewhere last night and it must have been Tony that done it. Dave the Slapper and the fat man were after him. They were going to wait in that doorway until he came out and then shoot him and run. Tony knew they were there. He'd seen them. Mebbe more of their gang would turn up during the day, sort of loafin' around the crates and barrels across the street and in the doorway opposite. Mebbe some of 'em would get inside the empty house across the street and shoot him through the window, and then there'd be hell to pay and she'd find herself all mixed up with the headquarters outfit and there'd be a lot of talk about cleaning up her part of the waterfront and she get sent off to the Island and have everything ruined. Goin' to the Island didn't make much difference when you was young but when you was fifty-three and had a business in one spot to look after instead of just any place on the street corners, you had to think about yourself. What in Hell did it matter about Tony? If he got killed he was killed and he otta been dead long ago anyway. Only she didn't want him killed on her premises, gettin' her into a lotta trouble. The dicks would begin to ask a lotta questions.

For an hour she polished glasses until they all glittered with the transparency of diamonds, for her concentration upon the question at hand gave them a chance for such a cleaning as they had never had. A couple of longshoremen came in for a drink and talked about the storm, stamping their feet on her clean floor and spitting into the shining brass spittoon. Then they went away and the newsboy from the ferry house brought her a paper. She paid him and, spreading the paper out on the top of the bar so that she could continue her work, she saw at once the picture of Rosa Dugan and read the headline, NIGHT CLUB SINGER STRANGLED IN EXCLUSIVE MURRAY HILL LOVE NEST. Putting down the glass she was wiping she turned the page and began to read it, slowly, because she always had difficulty reading English. In the middle of it she read about the fight the murdered woman had made for her life and she paused suddenly, thinking about Tony's face all scratched and torn. But she quickly put that theory aside and went on reading. A poor bum like Tony couldn't have been mixed up with a swell like Rosa Dugan, unless he tried to rob her, and the guy that did the killing hadn't robbed her, so it couldn't be Tony.

When she'd finished the story she sat back for a time thinking about it. A couple of niggers came in for gin and she gave it to them, and when they'd gone again, she resumed her leisurely reading, and came upon the story of "Lucky Sam" Lipschitz' end, and then she saw everything clearly.

It was Tony killed "Lucky Sam" and "Lucky Sam" be-

longed to Dave the Slapper's gang and the gang had found out where Tony was and they'd come to get him and they wouldn't go away until he was dead or some of his gang came to help him and then there'd be shooting in the street outside and mebbe inside the hotel too and there'd be Hell to pay with the police. Tony's gang mebbe wouldn't know where he was unless he got word to them and he couldn't telephone because there wasn't any telephone in the hotel and he couldn't get out without being shot. For a long time she polished glass in deep reflection, thinking what she had better do.

She saw that she had to get rid of Tony without getting mixed up with the police and she had to do it so that she stood in with both gangs because if she didn't one side or the other would come around and shoot up the place. They could all shoot each other until there wasn't any of 'em left so far as she was concerned, only she didn't want to be mixed up in it. And as she polished the glasses, she decided that no matter how it worked itself out Sicily Tony didn't have very much longer to live. He might just as well be dead already.

When at last all the glasses were shining she came out from behind the bar again and went and stood in the doorway for a minute, looking up and down the glittering white street, casually as if she'd just come to look at the weather, and on the opposite side of the street, among the crates and barrels, she saw a third man sitting. He was perched on a crate in the sun warming himself and smoking a cigarette and she noticed that he was sitting with a barrel between him and the Valparaiso Hotel so that any-

body looking out of the windows couldn't shoot him. But he was able to watch the door just the same.

When she went inside again she noticed that it was almost noon, and as she turned to go into the kitchen to see if everything was ready, she saw Tony coming in from the hallway again and made up her mind. He looked worse than ever and the bloodshot eyes were insane. She stopped in the middle of the floor and waited for him. He came up to her and said, "Lissen. You gotta do something for me."

She wasn't afraid of any man but she saw that this thing with the bloodshot eyes wasn't a man but something that was insane and not human, so she said, "Lissen. I ain't got to do anything for anybody."

"You gotta send a note."

She saw suddenly that it wasn't altogether because he was hungry for coke that he acted like this. He'd seen Dave the Slapper and the others waiting outside. He was scared. He was white and shaking. She'd seen men scared before but never as bad as this. It made her feel a little sick. A man like that might do anything, so she said, "Well, whatta yuh want me to do?"

He collapsed into a chair and sat there shaking and white, and still feeling a little sorry for him because whatever happened he was as good as dead already, she gave him a drink, and that seemed to loosen his tongue. He said he wanted her to telephone or send word to his gang to come to his aid, because the other bastards were outside laying for him.

"Yes," she observed grimly, "I seen 'em." And then,

"What's gonna happen to me when the other gang gets onto what I done?"

He began to promise her hysterically over and over again that his gang would protect her for life and she listened, coldly, looking at him with contempt and all the time she was thinking how she was going to work all ends against the middle and come out safe on top. He began to cry and she felt a sudden northern contempt for all hysterical wops and when he said, "If they get me, I'll get you first you old ——" she gave him a hard look and said, "Mebbe you can beat up some women and get away with nothin' but your mug scratched, but here's one can look out for herself. I could break every bone in your ratty little body, you dirty little ——"

She didn't mind being called filthy names because it was a form of address which had been familiar to her since childhood but she couldn't stand being bullied by a sniveling little rat.

She knew the kind. He'd stick a knife into your back in a minute if he thought he'd get away with it, but he wouldn't risk an open fight. He was scared of everything and tried to be a bully to show he wasn't scared.

And then all at once the plot that had been forming in her head took form and was born complete. She could fix it so she'd escape and Tony's gang and Dave the Slapper's gang and even the police would all think she was on their side. It was so easy. She wanted to laugh but couldn't because if she laughed he'd get suspicious. The only one who'd come off bad would be Tony and there wasn't any hope for him anyway.

So she said, "All right. What d'ya want me to do?"

He asked her for a piece of paper and a pencil and when she brought them he scribbled painfully a note and wrote on the outside of it "Mister Alassio" and an address in Joralemon Street, Brooklyn, and said, "Git somebody to take that . . . right away, see?"

"Yeah, and what am I gonna get out of it?"

He promised her everything, money, protection, trade, even jewelry, which made her laugh, and when he'd finished she said, "All right. Go on upstairs and hide again."

He looked at her again fearfully. "You're gonna do it right away, ain't yuh?"

She grinned at him and said, "Sure, right away," and when he disappeared through the door she still stood grinning and looking after him. She hated that kind of a little rat. What she liked was a big upstanding Swede that didn't tremble, shake and cry like a baby, but took what was coming to him, standing up. Only Swedes was never gunmen. They worked for a living.

When he had gone she went over again and looked out through the frosted glass. There was only one man in the doorway, now,—the little fat man with a bald head covered with white fuzz and an enormous behind—but over among the trucks and crates there were two or three, waiting.

2

Thrusting the note addressed to Mister Alassio into her belt she went into the kitchen and there told the nigger woman and the Swede who helped in the kitchen that she

was going out and that they'd have to serve anybody who came in to eat. And when she had looked into all the pans and kettles and made certain that everything was ready, she went back into the restaurant again and through the hallway, where she took down an old woolen sweater and a shawl, down into the cellar of the hotel. There she took up a short ladder and, opening a door, climbed the stairway into a small yard filled with ashes and rubbish. Here she planted the ladder firmly against the wall which separated the yard from the yard of the building next door and after testing it to see that it would stand her great weight, she climbed up it to the top of the wall and then, drawing it up after her, let it down on the opposite side into the yard behind the warehouse. When she had done this she hid the ladder behind some barrels and, pulling the shawl about her throat, entered the warehouse itself. It was nearly noon and there was no one about to see her and when she had made certain that it was safe, she went through the darkness, finding her way among crates and boxes, and came out, suddenly blinded by the glare of the snow, into the street on the next block. The men watching the hotel couldn't see her now. They'd never know that she left the hotel.

Picking her way among the cans of garbage and the rubbish that was burning in the soiled snow of the gutters, she went straight east for two blocks until she came to the cigar store on the corner. She entered and said, "Good-morning," and the little clerk with oiled black hair said, "Good-morning, Mrs. Dacklehorst. Vot kin I do for you?"

She bought two packages of cigarettes and noticed that

the shop was quite empty. Then she said, "I'm gonna telephone," and went to the far end of the shop and entered the telephone booth. She kept watching the shiny-haired clerk to make certain he didn't come near enough to the booth to hear what she was saying. The street-cars crashing by outside made a convenient blanket of sound and a little way off the clatter of the elevated lent its help. She lifted the receiver and heard "Number, pleeze" and said quickly "Police Headquarters." The voice came back, "Number, pleeze," and a little louder she said, "Police Headquarters."

There was a buzzing and clicking and then a voice said, "Police Headquarters." She took a deep breath and said, "I gotta tip for you."

"Who is it?"

"Never mind. I gotta tip for you. If you wanta get Sicily Tony he's in the Valparaiso Hotel on Death Avenue and he can't get out. Got that?"

"Yeah. But who izzit?"

"It's all right. It was him killed Lucky Sam. If you wanna get him, come quick."

She hung up, opened the door and grinned at the shiny-haired young man. "That was some blizzard, Mr. Eckleberg."

"It sure was, Mrs. Dacklehorst. I guess it'll all be running down the gutters by to-morra."

"I guess it will."

She went out and turned west again toward the river and when she came to the warehouse stables she entered a hallway and went up the stairs to a green doorway where she knocked and called out, "It's Mrs. Dacklehorst."

The door opened and she went into a small room that served as kitchen, sitting-room and dining-room. Over the stove hung a string filled with drying diapers. There was a thin wrinkled woman turning toward her from a bucket where she was washing out more diapers.

"Good-morning, Mrs. Klempf. I jes' stopped in because I gotta an errand for Jimmy."

Mrs. Klempf dried her hands and straightened her back and Mrs. Dacklehorst took the folded bit of paper out of her belt.

"Kin Jimmy take that for me? It's got the address on it."

"He ain't here jes' now. He'll be here in a minnit."

Mrs. Dacklehorst grinned again. "There ain't any particular hurry," she said. "Jes' so it gets there sometime this afternoon."

"Kin he eat his dinner first?"

"Sure. There ain't no hurry." She took out a tiny purse that she had strapped to her garter and began counting out money. "It'll be a nickel one way and a nickel home, by subway, and here's a quarter for Jimmy."

"Thanks, Mrs. Dacklehorst."

"And don't speak about it unless somebody asts you."

She went out, closing the door behind her, and when she reached the warehouse she retraced her steps exactly, through the warehouse over the wall, through the cellar and up into the hall where she hung up the woolen sweater and the shawl.

In the restaurant trade had already begun to arrive and she took up her place beside the cash register behind the bar, washing and polishing the glasses as the flat-footed

Swede, who served as waiter, returned them to her. They had never been polished so bright and clear.

Once, when the Swede seemed to have a breathing spell, she summoned him and said, "Go along up to Tony's room and tell him it's all right. I done what he ast me to."

Then she settled back to wait, thinking that business was good to-day and that she was a pretty smart woman. She'd settled Tony's hash and come out good on all sides, with the police and Tony's gang and Dave the Slapper's outfit.

Usually, she sat grim and forbidding behind her bristling mustache but to-day she was almost pleasant and exchanged jokes with her customers as she punched the cash register and listened to its cheerful ring. Presently it occurred to her that she might stand in well with the police and maybe make a little money on the side by pulling off tricks like the one she'd done this morning.

3

A little after one, she saw a plainclothesman coming into the restaurant from the hall. She punched out eighty-five cents on the cash register and turned toward him, all attention, gentle as a lamb and willing to do whatever was asked of her.

She said, "Good day" and the man who was one of the Headquarters outfit and whom she'd never seen before, said, "I've come to get a guy that's here in the hotel."

She said she was willing to help him and he asked if there was any back way out of the building and she said yes and told him about the cellar.

"I've got men outside. Nobody can git out. It's a guy called Sicily Tony. We got a tip about him."

"Yeah. He's there. Up on the fourth."

She called the Swede over to her and said, "Will you show this gen'man room number twenty-eight?" The Swede went to the doorway and stood waiting. He was out of hearing now what with the clatter of dishes and voices. She leaned across the polished bar and said, "It was me sent the tip. I done the telephonin'."

The plainclothesman's eyes widened a little. "Yeah?" he said.

"But don't tell nobody. I gotta look out for myself. Lucky Sam's gang was outside waitin' for him."

The man was thoughtful for a moment and then grinned. "Yeah. I get yuh, sister. Silent as the grave."

"Mebbe I might do it again."

"Yeah, sister. Silent as the grave."

He turned away from her and, as he went into the hall, she saw him joined by two other men, one of them a patrolman. They went up the stairs and she waited for the Swede. When he came down she told him to watch the cash register and then went into the kitchen and waited because she didn't want Tony to see her and because she didn't very much wanta see him bein' dragged off out of her hotel because she'd tipped the cops. In the kitchen she went and stood by the open window listening for sounds of a fight and maybe some shots. But there weren't any. Everything was quiet. She waited and waited and presently she heard steps on the stairs and because she couldn't bear not seeing what was going on she came out again from the

kitchen into the restaurant and hid herself behind the rack where her customers' ragged coats were hanging. The steps came nearer and nearer, down and down, and then she heard a voice, Tony's voice, crying and cursing hysterically and somebody else's voice telling him to shut up. There was the sound of a blow being struck and then more cursing from Tony.

Then she knew by the sound that they'd reached the ground floor and were going out into the street, and she crept out and went to the frosted glass where she pressed her mustachioed face against the pane and looked out.

They had him between two of the dicks, handcuffed to one of them. The other had his free arm, twisting it so that he'd walk and shut up his yelling. Across the street the waiting men had disappeared from among the crates and barrels and the fat sow-haunched man had gone from the doorway. Then she couldn't resist any longer and went to the door to look after the procession that was bearing Tony away. As she stood looking after him, she thought, "That's the end of him. He's dead already," and she felt suddenly sick. Then down the street the procession turned the corner toward the station house, and as Tony turned, he looked back. He didn't see her because she dodged into the doorway, but she saw his face, white and scared, bent back a little with the curling black hair tossed back from his low forehead, and again she felt sick, because in the face she saw something wild and exciting, something which she knew well out of all her long life of street corners and brothels. In a way she and Tony were brother and sister. She knew that look. Most men didn't have it. In one way

he was a better man than any of the Irish micks that was cartin' him off to the chair. And for the first time she saw that she had betrayed not only him but herself.

Still feeling a little sick, she went back to the bar and the cash register and fell to polishing glasses again and ringing up good hard money, but even that didn't make her feel any better.

CHAPTER XXIV

ONCE tea parties had been for Savina merely something which happened every day. Her friends came and brought their friends because they knew that Savina was always at home at five to receive them and that they would find in the long slightly dowdy drawing-room overlooking St. Bart's churchyard good company, not perhaps brilliant, but friendly and solid and interesting, and an immense array of delicious cakes and sandwiches, because Savina loved good food and found a greater pleasure in hospitality than in anything in the world; but for a long time now people had come less and less frequently so that there were even days when no one came at all. Some of them were dead and some lived in Europe or in the country, but most of them did not come because nowadays there was never time simply to drop in for a cup of tea or a glass of port. There were too many things to be accomplished in a single day, too many concerts to attend, too many lunch parties, too many committees, too many engagements made over telephones which were seldom silent. And Savina knew, best of all, that something civilized and

delightful and friendly had gone out of her life and out of the lives of her friends simply because there was no longer any time, and she knew too that if they had come just the same they would have been tired and a little jaded and thinking always that they must leave almost at once in order to find a little rest before dinner and before the evening began all over again. It was shocking to reflect merely upon the number of people one saw or talked to in a single day. There were, she knew, too many motors and too much noise. The telephone and the telegraph were much too efficient. Life was altogether too complex and violent and mechanical, and so it had lost the qualities which she cherished because they were the qualities of her youth, such things as leisure and charm and good temper. In this new city people might be brilliant and even dazzling but they could not be charming because charm required solitude and leisure for its development. And there was no more intimacy for intimacy too required peace.

So the tea parties were no longer daily affairs but became instead rather special events which required a good deal of effort in telephoning and writing notes, for it was impossible any longer to telephone in the morning and say to some one, "Will you come to tea this afternoon?" Every one was too busy. So the impromptu tea for Nancy Elsmore wasn't properly a tea party but simply a gathering of people whom she could scrape together at the last minute, and it troubled her lest Nancy, who didn't know this new strange city, would expect to find it unchanged and to discover at tea old friends she had left behind twenty-

five years ago. Because Savina had been proud of her tea parties it disturbed her to think that Nancy might find this one a strange mongrel failure of a party. After all, it was a strange assortment of people—Alida and herself and Philip Dantry and Mrs. Wintringham and perhaps Melbourn. Nancy, she thought, wouldn't understand about people like Mrs. Wintringham and Melbourn, and the fact that they were a part of what in Nancy's day was known as fashionable society.

It was after five and she was pottering about the room putting in order the books and pillows, rearranging the flowers which had been ordered because, without thinking quite why, she had felt that this was a singularly important occasion. She kept smiling to herself, feeling excited and happy, as if she were a child at her first party, and as she fussed and fidgeted, she became aware that Alida was also excited and nervous. Alida, who usually sat so serene and regal while life went on noisily and vulgarly all about her, had gathered up all her newspapers and carried them carefully into the library. She returned and gave a tug at the heavy brocade curtains at the bow window, trying to arrange them at exactly the proper angle. She even went about poking at the flowers which Savina had already arranged, and Savina did not mind because she understood that her own hands were clumsy and hooflike at such a task beside Alida's thin, small, blue-veined ones. But she wanted to laugh when, with the detachment and humor which frequently saved her, she suddenly saw herself and Alida as two starved old maids fidgeting about in excitement over the arrival of a woman

who perhaps knew everything about love that there was to be known. They were like two villagers awaiting the return of the prodigal who had gone out into the world.

Alida, still fussing over a pile of books, said for the tenth time, "I wonder what she looks like now."

And again Savina was brought up against the certainty that Nancy would be very different and that she wouldn't be the Nancy who had come to this same drawing-room to a rendezvous with Patrick Dantry. Perhaps they wouldn't even recognize her. Perhaps she would be, after such a life, a raddled painted old hag. But people who had seen her lately reported that she was still beautiful. "I don't know," she said. "It'll be amusing to see." But she knew that it would be much more than amusing. It might be tragic or bitter or shocking.

And then the bell rang and they both turned in an expectant silence, waiting, and Henry opened the door and into the room came a small pretty woman dressed very smartly with a fur thrown over her shoulder. She had taken off her hat and had beautiful shining red hair and deep blue eyes. For a brief and awkward instant she looked at them and then, smiling, she said, "Savina dear," and crossed the room and kissed Savina, but even then Savina had an uneasy sensation of having kissed a strange and rather pushing woman she had never seen before. And she saw that after all it was easier for Nancy to recognize her and Alida because they had gone the way of nature and turned old, than it was for them to recognize Nancy who had apparently stood still all these years in the most unnatural way. And when you had always pictured a

person with shining black hair it wasn't easy suddenly to adjust yourself to flaming red tresses. But this woman was certainly Nancy. You could tell by the dark eyes and the fluttery feminine manner.

She shook hands with Alida but did not kiss her and Savina was aware of sudden tightening of the atmosphere and understood that Alida was being superior because she was on the defensive. It was very queer, as if Alida had been the sinner and not Nancy, this ridiculous pretty Nancy, who had led a life of sin. It was as if Alida felt she was being reproached for her quiet humdrum respectable life. Nancy was as easy and charming as ever, just as pretty and inconsequent. Savina suddenly felt returning all the affection which she had thought long ago dried up at its source. Nobody could be really disagreeable to Nancy, not even Alida, because she was much too pleasant and disarming. She understood suddenly why it was that Nancy even at the worst period of her career had friends among the most respectable and upright people. With Nancy it was different. Nothing could ever make you believe that Nancy and Sin had anything in common. When Nancy turned away from Alida and came back to her, Savina saw that her eyes were shining with tears and that she could not say what was in her heart and her mind to say; but Savina knew what it was—that the sight of the rather shabby long room and the tea table and even the view out of the bow window, which had not changed at all, made Nancy think again of things which had happened in that room twenty-five years before; and Savina wondered suddenly whether it could be true that things which hap-

pened in a room like this one left behind them an aroma which did not die away but clung there always, and whether time was merely relative after all. Perhaps, she thought, she herself had always been happy in this room and loved it because long ago Nancy and Patrick had been very happy in it.

But she told herself, "All that is mystic nonsense," and aloud she said, "Tell me how you like your tea, my dear, and then we'll talk about New York and everything that's happened since you were here last."

But the talk didn't go easily, because it was hard to pick up the threads of an old association that had been broken so abruptly and so cleanly, and Savina still felt from time to time that she was talking to a stranger. They talked about the death of Aunt Juliana and this wedding and that one, but Nancy didn't really seem very interested, perhaps, thought Savina, because the center of her life had long since shifted from America to Europe and from New York to London. After all, you couldn't be very interested in the children and grandchildren of friends you hadn't seen in twenty-five years. And while they talked Alida sat drinking her *tilleul* and still looking hard and on the defensive, but slowly, as all her airs appeared to pass unnoticed by Nancy, she relaxed a little and turned human and began to throw a word now and then into the conversation.

They spoke of Sir John and that in turn led to Melbourn and at the mention of his name, Alida stiffened again as if she would rather not speak of such an adventurer, but Nancy was enthusiastic and said, "I think he's

one of the most attractive men I've ever met, and John says that in some ways he's the cleverest money man in the world to-day."

And Savina, encouraged, said, "I've only seen him once, but I thought him attractive."

Alida stiffened a little more as if to indicate that Melbourn was exactly the kind of man who would attract a woman like Nancy and said, "I've never seen him. I hope I never will. I know enough people already."

"But you probably will see him," said Savina, with a sudden, perverse brutality. "Because he's coming this afternoon to fetch Mrs. Wintringham. She telephoned me to ask if she might bring him."

"You see," said Alida, bitterly, addressing herself to Nancy, "how New York has changed."

"I don't know," said Nancy. "I can remember people like that. There were plenty of them even in our day, and now their children and grandchildren are all that's fashionable."

Savina knew what she was thinking and had left unsaid. She was thinking, "Patrick Dantry was exactly like that, and what difference did it make? He could have had whatever he wanted." Savina guessed that all the time she was sitting there, drinking tea quietly, she was thinking of Patrick Dantry. How could she help it in this room? She fancied that Nancy wanted more than anything else in the world to talk of him and dared not begin, but she found that she herself could not bring up the subject. It would be like asking her to suddenly take wing and fly out of the window. All their talk was empty and

banal because neither she nor Nancy was interested in what they were saying but wanted to talk about something else. The talk seemed to grow more and more dead and the twilight darker and darker.

She rose and turned on another lamp and then it occurred to her for the first time that this Nancy with the red hair, sitting in the chair by the fire, wasn't the old Nancy at all and that, after all, she had been deceived. There was no fire in this Nancy and none of the warmth that had made people adore her. This Nancy had all the pretty tricks and manners of pleasing and she was still good-tempered and unmalicious and amusing in a shallow way, but she was a shell and underneath there wasn't any fire. It had gone out and this woman, sitting in the chair, looking pretty and young, was an old woman and tired with a kind of weariness that hadn't touched her (Savina) or even Alida. Nancy wasn't interested any more in anything which didn't concern herself. She sat there, speaking of children and grandchildren, because she was nearly as old as themselves and so because they knew she was old, she couldn't try to deceive them; but in a curious way she was older than either of them and much more tired. And suddenly Savina didn't envy her but felt sorry for her the way she felt sorry for the tired pigeon that had dropped on to her window sill a month earlier out of a winter storm.

The talk about New York wandered about until at last Alida steered it to the murder of Rosa Dugan.

"It must have been near here . . . this . . . love nest?" observed Nancy, stumbling a little like a foreigner over the strange expression, and Alida, brightening suddenly,

rose and said, "It was just back of our house. Come, I'll show you the window."

Nancy rose, a little wearily, to follow her and Alida said, "You can see how New York has changed when such things happen on Murray Hill." She pushed aside the curtain and pointing, said, "The flat is on the third floor of that house opposite. They've taken away the body. They took it away early this afternoon." And Savina was aware suddenly of a horrid note of repressed excitement in Alida's soft, slightly affected voice. It made her suddenly dislike Alida in the way she sometimes disliked Hector when he crept all about a scandalous story with a morbid interest. It was all nasty and unhealthy like a woman in pretty slippers walking about in mud. And Nancy, who must know all about such things as love nests, was bored at having to rise from her chair and cross over to the window.

Then the door opened and Philip Dantry came in preceded by a pretty dark girl who upset and frightened Savina because at first it seemed for exactly one second that the Nancy of twenty-five years ago had entered the room. But as the girl came nearer she saw that it was really only an illusion due to her coloring and the way her head was set on her shoulders. She wasn't in the least like Nancy. She hadn't any of the distinction which Nancy always had, despite all her frivolity, and she was crossing the room with a self-confident rather brassy smile which was utterly foreign to Nancy. This girl pushed her way to the things which Nancy had always achieved by charm and insinuation. Savina knew at once that she must be

the surprise Philip had spoken of over the telephone; and she thought, "He's done it. He's made the mistake."

She rose heavily and noticed that Philip was grinning and blushing. He looked singularly handsome and more than usual like his father. He said, "This is my wife, Savina. We were married this afternoon." And then to the girl he said, "As a boy I used to call her Aunt Savina. I don't any more."

Savina kissed the girl and congratulated them and said all the obvious things about their happiness, but underneath it all she was frightened for the moment when Nancy, escaping the clutches of Alida, should turn from the window and discover Philip. Nancy was a little nearsighted and she would walk into the center of the room, peering at the strangers who had arrived, and then she would raise her lorgnette and suddenly see that Patrick Dantry, alive and young and handsome, was standing there by the tea table as if he had never run away with her and died in the bottom of a crevasse in Switzerland. No, it would be awful, and she ought never to have allowed them to meet here in this room. They had to meet somewhere, but anywhere else, anywhere else. Suddenly she felt hysterical and desperate.

With half her mind she asked the new Mrs. Dantry, "How do you like your tea?" and when she handed her the cup, noticed that she took it in gingerly fashion and crooked her little finger in the most "refined" fashion. Through her anxiety flashed the thought, "This girl is dreadful and pretentious," and then, "Where have I seen her before?" and, "Where did Philip find her?" and she

saw that Nancy was still held at the window by Alida who was telling her all about the murder whether she wanted to hear or not. And she thought, "It has happened just as I thought. Philip has been caught by this chit because he is so generous and nice. It would never have happened to his father because Patrick was a charming scamp who knew his way about the world."

And then Philip said, "Is Aunt Nancy coming?" and at the same moment Nancy and Alida turned and came down the three short steps from the bow window and Savina thought, "Of course, he's never seen her," and aloud she said, "There she is now."

Philip turned and, staring at the two women coming toward him, said, "Where?"

"The woman talking to Alida."

"But that's not Aunt Nancy."

And then Nancy was in the middle of the room, peering toward them, and Savina said, quietly, "Here's Philip, Nancy. He's brought his brand new wife to see you." And then she thought, "It's dreadful. I've done a dreadful thing." With an affected lightness, she said, "He's surprised us all. He got married to-day without saying a word to any of us."

Philip's new wife rose and went toward Nancy, but neither Philip nor Nancy was aware of anything but each other. It was awful.

2

It was awful for both of them. Philip, watching his aunt come toward him from the far end of the long room,

had for the first time in all his well-ordered life a swift feeling of utter uncertainty in which everything that was solid in his existence seemed suddenly to topple about him. This woman coming toward him was all wrong. She wasn't a lovely figure in a romantic white dress carrying a hat covered with flowers and trimmed with a great bow of blue ribbon. This woman with shingled red hair dressed in a tight little tailored suit with a skirt at her knees couldn't possibly be Aunt Nancy. She wasn't hard like this, and trim and sprightly like a street sparrow.

They were quite close to each other now and he took her hand. She raised her face a little as if she expected him to kiss her and then drew away quickly, and Philip saw that she too was frightened although he did not know why. Neither of them said anything and Philip was aware that in the painful silence they were being watched by all the others. And then suddenly Savina, hysterically, said just what she should not have said.

"Is he what you expected him to be, Nancy? It must be queer seeing a nephew you've never seen before since he was a baby."

And Philip's new wife laughed and said, "Yes. Philip told me about his aunt. It must be funny." And she laughed again in a way that sounded all wrong and Savina was suddenly filled with rage at her and thought, "Even if she doesn't know what is happening, she ought to be aware that it's something that doesn't concern her."

And then Nancy said quietly, "But we have met before. You see, Philip came to see me with Bidda in Paris when Hector was there last. It must have been . . ." She hesi-

tated and then went quickly on, "Ever so long ago." But the sentence trailed off dismally into an anticlimax and every one was aware that she hadn't wanted to say how many years had passed since she had seen Philip.

"We kept it a secret. Uncle Hector never knew," said Philip. "Old Bidda never told."

Again, watching them, Savina had an insane feeling that time had stood still and that nothing had happened and that Patrick Dantry and Nancy were there in the drawing-room, but almost immediately she saw that it wasn't true because Nancy was old and if Philip had been Patrick he would have turned everything into a joke and shattered all the tension that surrounded them. But he wasn't his father. He hadn't the grace or the wit or the charm of that scamp. So Savina said desperately, "We must have some port and all drink the health of the bride and groom." She was aware that she bustled much too much and was much too hearty as she rang the bell, and said brightly, "And they must tell us all about the wedding and how it happened." But she was thinking how odd it was that the surprise Philip had promised them didn't seem important or interesting and that the romance of Philip's father and Nancy which had ended a quarter of a century earlier had taken the edge from it and made it seem trivial and commonplace. Perhaps, she thought, it was because Philip's new wife was herself trivial and cheap or because she didn't really love Philip, that their romance couldn't stand up beside the one that was dead. The girl, she thought, was annoyed because they didn't make more of it and because Nancy instead of herself

seemed to be the center of interest. And then suddenly she remembered where she had seen Philip's new wife and as Henry brought the port and put it and the glasses on the table, she said, "But aren't you Janie Fagan?"

The new Mrs. Dantry suddenly beamed. "Yes, I am."

"I've been trying to think where I'd seen you. It was stupid of me." She turned to Nancy who seemed suddenly to have wilted and become old and said, brightly, "Do you hear that, Nancy? Philip's wife is Janie Fagan. She's one of the best known actresses. I myself," she said, lying desperately, "would say she was the best of them all."

An odd mechanical smile fixed itself on Nancy's face and she said, "That's wonderful. I must see you act at once, my dear." But Savina saw that she was able to speak and to wrest her thoughts back to the small talk only by a great and painful effort and that she was not thinking of any of them at all.

Alida, the voracious newspaper reader, said, "Miss Fagan's appearing in a new play which opened last night. I've read the notices. They were wonderful."

"Not all of them, I'm afraid," said young Mrs. Dantry. "But then nobody can have all good notices. The theater is so full of jealousies."

Savina gave Alida an understanding look of gratitude and suddenly loved her again for taking a hand in the situation and trying to make the party bearable. She saw that it must be really dreadful if Alida felt herself called upon to make an effort.

Again there was a slow awkward silence and Savina

said desperately, "But it must be a very interesting life. I've always envied actresses. I used to act charades myself when I was a girl," and at once she thought, "May God strike me dead if I utter such another banality." But she was aware that the thing she must do was to keep the attention of all of them fixed upon Philip's new wife because that was what she wanted and expected and because it served at the same time to throw Nancy into the shadow which was obviously now where she wanted to be. She was sitting there by the fire with a fixed smile on her face, rather like a polite wax dummy in a shop window dressed to illustrate what was being worn at a fashionable tea party, but it was quite clear that she was hearing nothing that any of them were saying. She had the air of having collapsed suddenly. There wasn't even the shadow of youth about her any longer. Savina kept praying that the others would arrive because the more people there were in the room the easier it would be for every one. And this new wife of Philip was being difficult. She was challenging them all, quite as clearly as if she said in the most vulgar way, "I'm as good as any of you." You felt her hostility in the air. It was silly of her, thought Savina, when they were all trying to be nice to her. She had begun by being too easy and familiar and now she was being aloof and nasty with a chip balanced on her shoulder.

So Savina didn't follow the conversation very closely because her sensitive mind was so full of absurd distractions. She understood angrily that she was suffering because she was too painfully aware of all the shadowy small things that were happening among the people about

her. But Alida was being noble and heroic and asking Philip and that awful brassy girl all about their romance, which was of course exactly the thing to do. Alida could afford to do it because nothing ever really touched her and she really didn't care about what was happening to Nancy just now or whether Philip had made a dreadful mistake.

And then the door opened and Sir John bounced into the room looking pink and white and healthy and she saw that Nancy relaxed suddenly and looked brighter. "That," thought Savina, "is because he is a rock of security for her. Whatever else happens she has him. And she likes him." She herself liked him and Alida and Philip as soon as they met him. Only Philip's new wife seemed to bristle and resent him because once again she had been pushed from the center of attention. There was something blunt and normal and vigorous about him which would never permit him to become tangled in all the web of complications that had caught them all. He shook hands all around and then went and seated himself on the sofa beside Nancy as if they, instead of Philip and Janie Fagan, had been married only yesterday. And the effect on Nancy was magical. She became pretty and young once more, and Savina thought, "Personality is an extraordinary thing. His coming was like opening the window in a stuffy room." And then she saw that each of them had a personality which had produced its own curiously clear effect as he entered the room and that she herself had perhaps had none at all at the moment because she was straining to make of herself a kind of solvent which

would bring them all together. She was, she saw, engaged in spreading herself with an incredible thinness.

She managed to draw Philip aside and asked anxiously, "Have you told Hector?"

"No. Not yet."

"Because you must tell him before it gets into the papers. It would be too cruel to let him discover it in a newspaper."

"I'm going right from here to tell him. I haven't had time yet."

"Did he suspect anything?"

"No. I don't think so. You see it happened quite suddenly. We only decided to be married last night."

He blushed rather unaccountably, and Savina said, "He won't like it."

"No."

"I thought at first I might get you to break it to him but then I decided I was the one."

"Oh, yes. You must do it. Are you going to take her with you?"

"No."

"That's right. It mightn't be pleasant."

And she thought suddenly, "Here we are again, all trying to make things easy for Hector." Everybody always did it. Everybody was always protecting him.

The door was opening again and this time it was Melbourn and Mrs. Wintringham. When she saw them Savina thought, "It's all over. Fanny has lost and he belongs to Mrs. Wintringham." It seemed to her that a kind of radiance came in with them, the same radiance which

should have come in with Philip and Janie Fagan and which did not. She was dressed smartly and looked not pretty, like Nancy or Philip's new wife, but beautiful, and he appeared less gray and tired than he had been at Hector's dinner last night. She left Philip quickly and went over to them, aware suddenly that the mere sight of them gave her pleasure and she thought quickly, "Perhaps it is because they alone have been strong enough to steer a straight course. Perhaps that is why they seem confident and relaxed and untroubled."

And it seemed to her that they were the city itself, this strange brilliant, barbaric city which had left her behind in her dowdy comfortable drawing-room in spite of anything she could do.

3

With the arrival of Melbourn and Mrs. Wintringham, the party went into a third phase and became miraculously a success. Perhaps it was because there were too many people in the room to permit its being dominated by any one person, or perhaps it was because Sir John and Mrs. Wintringham and Melbourn had the power of lifting all of them out of the realms of vanity and pettiness. Philip's wife was lost now and unable any longer to make her shrewishness felt by any of them. It all began to go well and Savina, feeling suddenly very tired from the strain, relaxed and permitted herself to watch. She saw many things—that Nancy brightened whenever Melbourn spoke to her and that Sir John was a little bedazzled by Ruby Wintringham and that Mrs. Wintringham was again, as

she had been the night before, perfect, and that between her and Philip's new wife there was a strong dislike, and that they kept watching each other with a certain amount of stealth.

There was the necessary flutter over the news of Philip's sudden marriage and then Melbourn said, quietly, "I've another piece of news. Mrs. Wintringham and I are being married next week," and this caused much more astonishment than the news of Philip's marriage, and so again Janie Fagan grew sulky. Port had to be drunk all over again and Savina thought, "He's evidently gotten rid of Fanny for good; but how did he do it?" because Fanny wasn't the kind one could shake off easily. She thought, too, that this was perhaps a perfect marriage in which the two people would understand each other completely, and then she felt depressed when she thought of Philip and his wife trying to understand each other, and wondered how long it would be before he discovered that underneath all the prettiness there was another Janie who was vain and cheap and selfish. He was, of course, like all men in love. They never saw the women they loved at all, or rather they saw them through a kind of glass that gave a perfectly false image, and then when things began to cool off a bit the image began to take on its true form and they discovered whether they had made a mistake or not. Sometimes it took years and sometimes days. It all depended upon how long the first flush of love was preserved.

Suddenly she thought again about Andrew MaClellan's obscene cinema entertainments and it occurred to her that

love was a matter of glands and chemistry and she wondered shamefully what an X-ray cinema of Philip in love would look like—nothing more perhaps than a series of glands all functioning abnormally, like the engine of a steamboat being driven to establish a record, all forcing him into reproducing his kind. And like most men, he would sublimate the effect of the glands into all sorts of romantic nonsense, investing their stimulus with all sorts of qualities which she clearly did not possess. Perhaps men and women had invented romance in order to save their own dignity and had disguised the terrible driving impulse of their own physical chemistry with all sorts of sentimental draperies in order to save their own pride, because it was neither pretty nor dignified to think of yourself merely as an insignificant instrument toward an end you had not even considered. All the while men were simply insects of the most insignificant sort being driven by a tyrannical power along paths which had nothing to do with their own wills. Nature did not concern itself with their happiness nor with what became of them once they had accomplished what she meant them to accomplish. It did not matter to Nature whether they were faithful and monogamous or unfaithful and as promiscuous as guinea pigs, because, of course, Nature was not concerned with moral peccadillos. Romance and morality and sentiment and even laws were simply excrescences constructed through thousands of years all about the main question in order to disguise it and save the ego and vanity of men. And in the case of Philip and his new wife, Philip wouldn't even accomplish what Nature was driving him to do, be-

cause there wasn't a chance in the world that a creature like Janie Fagan would aid him in reproducing his kind.

It was, thought Savina, all very disturbing to see the world in terms of Andrew MaClellan's movies, yet it was in a way refreshing and gave one a sense of absolute security. In Andrew's cinema you dealt with bare truths, all stripped clean of nonsense. Perhaps it was this vision of life which gave Andrew's clear blue eyes that astonishing frank look of certainty and power.

And then suddenly she began to see every one in the room in the terms of stomachs. It was dreadful, but she experienced a sudden curiosity to see movies of all their insides as if in some way it would help her to see through their protective shells into the verity of their souls. "Perhaps," she thought, "the whole history of the world is written by glands. It might explain Queen Elizabeth and Catherine of Russia and Philip the Second and Charles the Fifth and Woodrow Wilson."

But in the midst of these disturbing thoughts she heard them talking about Rosa Dugan and knew that Alida had managed to lead them back to the one thing which really interested her. She heard Melbourn saying, "There's no doubt that they've got the right man. They've got the whole story now."

And Alida, suddenly flushed with excitement, said, "It *is* the Italian then. Where did you hear it?"

"I've seen the police commissioner. I had the whole story from him."

Savina, listening, wondered why he should have seen the police commissioner and what he and the police commissioner could have in common beyond politics. And she heard Alida saying, "Tell us all about it. Have they found out who 'Mr. Wilson' is?"

"No, they haven't found out."

And then he told the story which had not yet come to Alida in the papers.

The man was an Italian, a gunman, called Sicily Tony and they'd arrested him not for the murder of Rosa Dugan but for the shooting of another gunman on the same night Rosa Dugan was murdered. Somebody had telephoned a tip to the police and they found him in a hotel on the North River. He was a drug addict and when they got him to police headquarters he was raving for drugs, and he was frightened too because the gang of the gunman he'd shot had been waiting outside the hotel to get him when he tried to get out to find more drugs. At headquarters he had turned into a madman and they had had to tie him down to an iron cot. His ravings went on for an hour or more and then suddenly he went all limp and began by confessing that he'd shot a gunman called Lucky Sam something or other and when he'd got through with that he said that he was the man who killed Rosa Dugan. At first they didn't believe him and thought he was completely crazy or that he was simply trying to get his name in headlines as long as he was finished anyway.

But the story he told was convincing. He seemed to know all about the flat and a telephone covered by a pink doll and even described the lights in the room and a

mirror that had been freshly mended. He said Rosa Dugan was his wife and that he'd been living with her for the past two months, all the time she was being kept by the mysterious "Mr. Wilson." So at last they became convinced and checked up on the story and found from the records that it was all true. She'd been married to him ten years earlier after he'd been arrested and convicted and sent to Sing-Sing. And then the nigger maid identified him as "the little black man" and the doorman at the night club identified him as the man who had come to see Rosa Dugan two hours before she was murdered. He said he'd thrown Sicily Tony out into the street for annoying her. And then her brother identified him as her husband. Sicily Tony said he'd killed her out of jealousy because she had the other man in the same apartment in another room that was locked and that she wouldn't give him the key. And then he said he hadn't meant to kill her. He'd gone there to kill the other man and only killed her by accident. He didn't know who the other man really was. He just kept crying over and over again, "I killed her and I wanta die too. I killed her and I wanta die too."

"There isn't any doubt," said Melbourn, "they've got the right man and even if he goes back on his confession, they've got him anyway. The police have been wanting to get him for a long time. They're not going to let him get away now."

Savina, sitting there beside the tea table in her comfortable drawing-room, listened to the story with one part of her brain while another part was busy with the thought

of how thrilling it would be for a woman to have a lover so passionate that he would kill for the sake of jealousy, and it occurred to her that maybe Rosa Dugan hadn't minded being killed by such a lover. It would be like the praying mantis which decapitated its mate at the supreme moment of creation. You could imagine such a thing. Most people would think of such a thing as depravity but then a large part of the human race took an attitude of superiority toward Nature and looked upon even the feebler of her manifestations as depraved. But of course what mattered was that Nature did not mind the criticisms of priests and reformers. She managed to carry on in spite of them, and when something happened like this murder or like the affair between Nancy and Patrick nobody had a chance when it came to opposing her.

And then she thought that an X-ray cinema of the glands of the murderer at the time of the crime would be of extreme scientific interest. Surely it would show them working at an abnormal speed destined to destroy the machine itself, just as they had in the end destroyed both Rosa and the murderer himself. She decided that it was all very exciting but a little dangerous to let yourself go this way, thinking all sorts of upsetting thoughts, especially at the age of sixty-nine; but of course it would be terrifically exciting and dangerous if you began thinking such thoughts at the age of twenty. If every one thought them the world and civilization itself would all blow to pieces and everybody would begin all over again where the human race had begun a couple of million years earlier.

That would be very exciting and of course it might make every one a great deal more happy and natural and contented, and certainly it would do away with an immense number of human sentimentalities and pretensions. It was very humbling to think of people in terms of Andrew's stomach movies.

4

But the tea party was breaking up and Melbourn and Mrs. Wintringham were saying good-by and the others were standing about still talking. One by one they left, but Savina did not have a very clear impression of the order in which they left nor what they were saying because the most fantastic thought had occurred to her. It was that at sixty-nine she had suddenly discovered her proper calling and that it was Andrew's cinema which had put her on the right track. For at least forty-nine years she should have been working in a laboratory, the way Andrew had been working. If she had done that she might now have had the same look in her eyes that was in Andrew's eyes instead of being a pottering muddled old woman who had exhausted herself worrying about whether the people at her tea party were enjoying themselves or not.

When she turned away from the door after the last good-by she saw that the latest evening papers had come and that Alida, seated again at the window, was reading the very latest news, perhaps the same story that Melbourn had just told them, and all at once something clicked in her brain and she saw everything—that "Mr. Wilson"

was Jim Towner and that it was Fanny who had sent for Melbourn and asked him to help her and so he had been to see the police commissioner, and that Melbourn had probably bargained with her for his complete freedom and so could now tell the world that he was marrying Mrs. Wintringham.

She stood for a time before the fire warming her great clumsy body which had suddenly grown chilled from nervous exhaustion. Standing there, she thought, "Why should I go on like this? Why should I wear myself out in this absurd way? I shall go to Hector to-night and ask him to marry me and, whether he will or not, I'll take him away around the world. Nothing matters to us any more except that both of us should be happy and comfortable. There isn't much time left. Alida will have to do without me."

She looked at Alida, poring over the story of poor Rosa Dugan, and she wondered what Alida would be like now if she had ever known the love of a man with excitable glands like Sicily Tony. Certainly she wouldn't be sitting there, crotchety and distracted by imaginary ills, reading greedily the story of a passion which she could not even imagine. And she saw suddenly that all her life had been given up to hospitals and charities and people like old Aunt Juliana and Hector and Alida, so that she'd never had time to live herself nor even discover a means of living. All her life had been like this dreadful tea party, worrying and fretting over other people because she was too aware of how they suffered and of the muddles in which they were perpetually finding themselves. It was

time now that she had a fling on her own and Alida had no right to hold her back. She would propose to Hector to-night at dinner, and there was no better time to have it out with Alida than this very minute when Alida was distracted by Rosa Dugan's story and wouldn't mind as much as when she was bored and there were no crimes of passion to read about.

She started toward Alida to speak and then found she couldn't and fell instead to looking out of the window at the house across the churchyard. She heard again that single scream and thought, "I could perhaps have saved her. If we'd been in a little town, I'd have gone to find out where the scream came from." And then she thought again of the praying mantis and it occurred to her that perhaps Rosa Dugan knew things that she and Alida couldn't even imagine and maybe hadn't wanted to be saved.

She was aware that the window on the third floor was dark now and it seemed to her that the darkness was more than a mere absence of light and that it pervaded all of the churchyard and entered even the room where Alida sat reading. It was as if some great light had gone out. But she told herself that of course such an idea was mere nonsense and that this sudden access of mysticism must be a sign of old age and decay.

She must speak to Alida, now, at once, before she had to dress and begin another evening and, turning, she began, "Alida, there's something I must discuss with you."

But Alida did not hear her. Looking up she said, in

her soft, slightly affected voice, "They found the key to the parlor in the bottom of her cold cream jar. She'd hidden it there to keep Sicily Tony from getting into the next room to kill 'Mr. Wilson.'"

THE END

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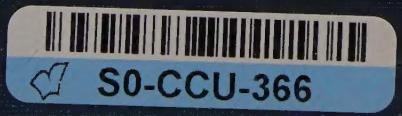
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